

RESEARCH Report 36

Land redistribution and poverty reduction in South Africa: The livelihood impacts of smallholder agriculture under land reform

Edward Lahiff, Themba Maluleke, Tshililo Manenzhe and Marc Wegerif



PLAAS
PROGRAMME FOR LAND AND AGRARIAN STUDIES
School of Government, UWC

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Published by the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government,
University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa.

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Website: www.plaas.org.za

Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies research report no. 36

ISBN 978-0-620-41277-3

May 2008

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Copy editor: Laurie Rose-Innes

Cover photograph: Bill Derman. Photograph shows Themba Maluleke of PLAAS in the foreground (red baseball hat) and Ndukwane Rex Mdhuli in the background (cowboy hat), who is a farmer on the farm Uitschot.

Cartographer: John Hall

Layout: Designs4development, info@d4d.co.za

Typeset in Frutiger

Printing: RNK Graphics

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ARDC	Agriculture and Rural Development Corporation
CASP	Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme
CPA	communal property association
CPI	communal property institution
CRLR	Commission on Restitution of Land Rights
DLA	Department of Land Affairs
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DoL	Department of Labour
DWAF	Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
GGP	gross geographic product
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LED	Local Economic Development
LRAD	Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development
LSU	large stock unit
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MFA	Monyamane Farmers Association
NDA	National Development Agency
PSU	post-settlement unit
RDG	Restitution Discretionary Grant
RLCC	Regional Land Claims Commissioner
SADT	South African Development Trust
SLAG	Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant
SPG	Settlement Planning Grant

Acknowledgements

This report presents the findings of over two years' research conducted in Limpopo province in a partnership between the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape and the Nkuzi Development Association. The authors wish to thank everyone who contributed their time and resources to this work and who assisted us in so many ways. In particular, we extend our appreciation and thanks to the farmers of Dikgolo, Mahlahluvani, Monyamane and Shimange for facilitating this research and for sharing so much of their knowledge with us.

We gratefully acknowledge the Ford Foundation, Southern Africa, as the funder of this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since its inception in 1994, South Africa's land reform programme has aimed to achieve multiple objectives, including redressing the historical racial imbalance in landholding, alleviating poverty and developing the rural economy. A range of policies has been developed to deal with restitution of historical land rights, redistribution of agricultural land and protection of the rights of people living in communal areas and on commercial farms. Delivery, however, has been painfully slow, with all key policy areas falling far behind their stated targets (DLA 1997; Hall 2004).

Developments within the wider southern African region have demonstrated the enduring political importance of land reform and the potential for inequalities in landholding to destabilise national economies (Sachikonye 2002; Lahiff & Cousins 2001). These developments, coupled with the slow pace of delivery, have led to an ongoing questioning of the aims of land reform in South Africa and the methods best suited to achieving them. The market-based approach to land reform, in particular, has been criticised by scholars as contributing to the slow pace of reform, the high costs of the programme, inappropriate targeting of beneficiaries and inadequate post-settlement support (Lahiff, Borras & Kay 2007).

A critical issue for land reform is the alleviation of poverty, which is heavily concentrated in the rural areas. Alternative economic opportunities, whether in terms of formal employment or involvement in the informal sector, remain extremely limited. There is convincing evidence that poverty, in both relative and absolute terms, is growing, with the majority of all rural dwellers living below the poverty line (May 2000; HSRC 2004; Borat & Kanbur 2006).

Evidence of the impact of land reform on poverty is extremely limited, however, and is hampered by a lack of reliable empirical data on all aspects of the programme (Lahiff 2007). While a certain amount is known about the performance of the land reform programme at the aggregate level – such as money spent, hectares transferred and number of beneficiaries – little empirical information is available at the project or household level. Key issues, such as the socio-economic profile of participants and the impact of land reform on their livelihoods, remain effectively unanswered. No longitudinal studies have been

attempted that allow for an understanding of what happens once households or communities acquire land, or what the impacts on livelihoods, productivity or poverty are over time. Formal monitoring and evaluation of the land reform programme has not been sufficient to allow for any firm conclusions to be drawn on these critical issues.

The Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) has been involved in research into land reform and related issues in South Africa since 1996. Much of its work has focused on the policy dimension, in terms of both evaluations of particular programmes and input into policy debates. From 2002 to 2003, PLAAS conducted the study *Evaluating land and agrarian reform in South Africa* (see Hall, Jacobs & Lahiff 2003), which provided the first comprehensive review of land reform policy and implementation, and highlighted various gaps and weaknesses in the current approach. It identified a need for new thinking around crucial issues such as beneficiary selection, land acquisition, project design and post-settlement support.

This research project aimed to build on previous work and provide an in-depth assessment of specific land reform interventions and their impact on the livelihoods of beneficiaries. Analysis of case studies and interaction with other related activities undertaken by PLAAS and its partners would link in-depth studies of land reform projects with policy analysis and development.¹ Thus, the findings of this and other studies would provide the basis for a thoroughgoing assessment of existing policies and lead to recommendations in key areas of land reform policy, based on continuing analysis and debate and grounded in empirical evidence from the field.

The project ran from May 2005 to July 2007, with the main fieldwork being conducted between July 2005 and April 2007. The study was limited to the Limpopo province and, within it, to the district municipalities of Capricorn and Vhembe. Limpopo was selected due to its high concentration of rural poverty, the large number of land reform projects underway in the province, and in-depth knowledge of the area by our research partner, Nkuzi Development Association, a non-profit land rights organisation based in the province.

¹ See the Livelihoods after Land Reform project website (<http://www.lalr.org.za/>).

Specific objectives of the project were to:

- investigate the impact of land reform on the livelihoods of intended beneficiaries;
- identify the evolving livelihoods strategies of resettled people;
- understand the social, economic and political context within which land reform projects are being implemented; and
- generate inputs to wider debates on land reform policy.

Research design and methods

Various research methods were employed, working at a range of levels stretching from individual farmers to the national policy environment. The main focus of investigation and analysis, however, was on case studies of four land reform 'projects', around which the rest of the research was organised.

During the inception phase of the study (May to July 2005), meetings were held with the three key governmental institutions dealing with land reform in Limpopo, namely the Department of Land Affairs (DLA), the Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC). Initially, contact was made with the head of department, or equivalent, and meetings were arranged with senior officials. These meetings were used to introduce the project and the researchers, to request up-to-date information on the activities of the various departments, and to consult on possible case study sites. The DLA and the RLCC supplied lists of land reform projects in the province and made suggestions as to potential research sites.

Information supplied by the provincial office of the DLA showed that a total of 71 Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) projects and 136 Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) projects had been approved up to the end of 2004. In addition, 18 restitution claims involving restoration of land had been settled or approved for settlement by that date, according to the office of the RLCC.

It was decided to limit our selection to land reform projects in two of the four districts of Limpopo (Vhembe and Capricorn) and, in line with the objectives of our research project, to cases where beneficiaries were directly involved in agricultural production. The districts of Vhembe and Capricorn were selected on the basis of proximity to our research bases in Polokwane and Elim, but also because they contained a wide range of

socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions that could be seen as broadly representative of the province as a whole.

From the lists supplied, projects were excluded if they were still at the planning stage, if they were not currently active, if they did not involve direct use of land by beneficiaries themselves or if other research or redevelopment initiatives were underway that could conflict with our research. The emphasis throughout was on cases where it was believed that relatively poor people had direct access to land for agricultural purposes, which was in line with the overall objectives of the research. Excluded at this stage were projects where land had been obtained under restitution but where production was in the hands of a large corporate entity and community members did not enjoy direct access to land for their own use.

A particular challenge was posed by LRAD projects. The LRAD programme had emerged, since about 2002, as the principal instrument of redistribution policy in Limpopo. It was felt important, therefore, to include some LRAD projects in our sample, alongside projects arising from the older SLAG programme and from restitution projects. Initial investigations suggested that the higher grants associated with LRAD (R20 000 to R100 000 per individual, as opposed to R16 000 per household for SLAG) meant that LRAD projects were likely to involve fewer members and greater areas of land per person. Also, given the lack of any income ceiling in LRAD, and the official emphasis on private investment, loan financing and commercially oriented production, it was also thought likely that LRAD projects would be structured along quite different lines. At the outset, it was an open question for the researchers whether LRAD and other forms of land reform could usefully be investigated within a single analytical framework.

The process of elimination produced a shortlist of eight SLAG projects, five restitution projects and six LRAD projects, all of which were visited between May and August 2005. The SLAG projects were concentrated in Capricorn, and four of them were bunched together in the Dikgale area (see the Dikgole case study, below). Of these, Dikgole was selected as a land reform project where small-scale food cropping was being practiced under marginal (rain-fed) conditions (see Map 1). The Monyamane project, also in Capricorn, was selected as a project based on extensive livestock production under low-rain-

fall conditions. Of the restitution projects, four similar projects were grouped together in the Elim-Vleifontein area of Vhembe, and of these Shimange was selected as representative of the group (see Shimange case study, below). The remaining restitution project, Mahlahluvani, was atypical in that the case had not been settled, yet people were already occupying the land and using it for agricultural production. It was decided that although Mahlahluvani had elements of an unofficial land occupation, it was clearly linked to a land reform process and – possibly because of its unofficial status – this type of land use was directly relevant to our study. Thus, Mahlahluvani was selected as an ‘unofficial’ land reform initiative in an area of relatively high rainfall, which appeared to have lessons to offer regarding the potential for smallholder cropping.

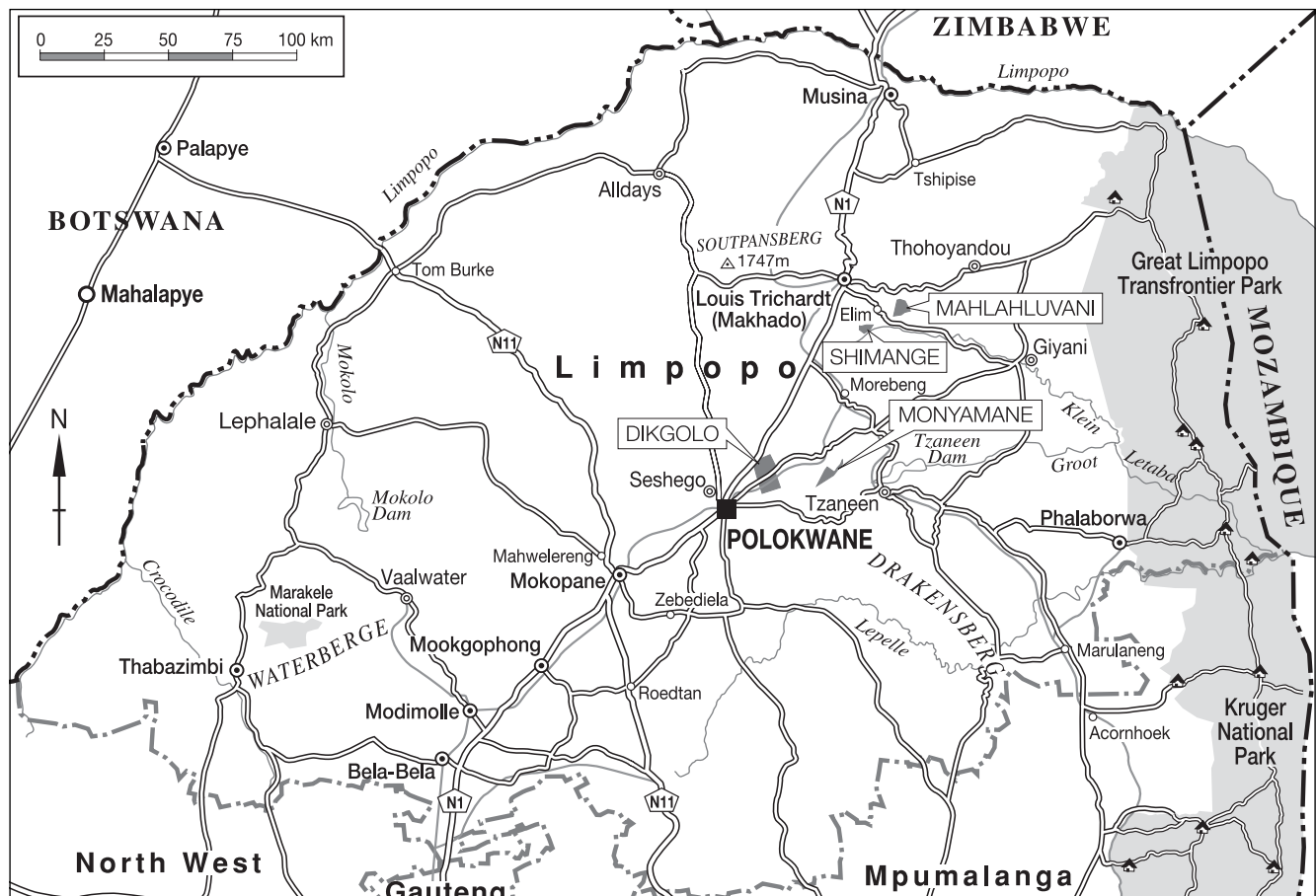
Of the six LRAD projects identified from the initial list, only four – two each in Capricorn and Vhembe – were found to be in production.² Two visits were made to each of these projects between July and September 2005, with a follow-up visit in February and March 2006. At that

point, it was decided that these projects were so different to the SLAG and restitution projects that they would require quite a different research design; consequently, no further research was conducted at these sites.

Thus, four cases were selected for detailed study, and in-depth analysis was conducted at the level of both the project and the individual (or household) participants. In addition, investigations were undertaken in order to understand the institutional context within which they operated. These included interviews with local traditional leaders and elected public representatives, interviews with representatives of private sector companies and non-governmental organisations active in the area, and engagement with local, provincial and national government agencies with actual or potential involvement in land reform and these particular projects. While some of these engagements were simply one-off meetings or interviews, others – particularly with local councillors and officials of the Limpopo DoA – involved repeated contact, including feedback on the progress of our research and joint visits to the research sites, over a period of two years.

² These projects were Chokoe, Majuta, Tau Phuti Tlou and Vele.

Map 1: Limpopo province, showing locations of the four case studies



The first objective was to develop a comprehensive picture of each project in terms of its membership, its activities and its internal organisation. The second was to situate the projects within their wider context, which included the local community, local government (represented by officials and councillors of local and district municipalities, and traditional leaders), agricultural extension and land reform support services, as well as upstream and downstream market linkages. This was achieved by repeat visits to the projects (three or four visits per project), which included field observations and interviews with individual members and with leadership structures. Exhaustive efforts were made to interview all relevant stakeholders for each project.

This phase of research also drew the attention of all relevant stakeholders (many of whom seemed to be unaware of the projects operating within their area of responsibility) to the land reform projects and to the research project, as well as shedding light on the role (if any) played in land reform by the various organisations. A full list of organisations consulted is contained in Appendix 1 of this report.

Detailed investigation of the four case studies involved two main data-gathering methods:

- collective engagement with some or all of the members of the project, and
- in-depth interviews with individual members.

Collective engagement sought to understand the nature of the project as a whole, in all its dimensions. This involved group meetings with project members, interviews with group leaders, focus-group discussions with subgroups of members, particularly women, and repeated observations of project activities over an extended period. All four case study sites were visited at least once a month between July 2005 and May 2007.

Between December 2005 and April 2006 research focused on in-depth studies of livelihoods and agricultural production. This period corresponds with the main agricultural season in Limpopo and provided a good sense of how the projects functioned and who their members were. Interviews with individual members were piloted with a limited sample and short questionnaires. At the same time, efforts were made to identify all active members (or participants) in the various projects.

On the basis of this preliminary work, a detailed questionnaire was developed and administered to all active project members between March

and December 2006. Rather than sampling, it was decided to interview every individual participant, and a questionnaire was designed for this purpose. Initial discussions suggested a total active membership of 144 across the four cases. Over the course of the year, however, only 122 individuals members (or households) could be identified, and all of these were interviewed between December and April. The questionnaires focused on household livelihood strategies, involvement in the land reform projects and individual agricultural activities.

In addition to individual interviews, participatory group activities were conducted, with the aim of allowing participants to become more directly involved in the research and to strengthen the qualitative dimension of the study. Participatory mapping exercises were conducted at Dikgolo and Mahlahluvani, which provided a vehicle for extensive debate on how plots were allocated and how disputes were resolved. Seasonality analyses were conducted with subgroups at Mahlahluvani and Shimange to investigate the production cycle, the use of labour and the decision-making processes of individual producers. At Dikgolo and Shimange, farmers were assisted in measuring the size of their plots, which revealed considerable diversity and also a general overestimate by plot-holders (when compared to prior interviews). Separate focus-group discussions were held with livestock farmers and crop farmers at Monyamane, Shimange and Dikgolo. Extended visits to individual plots were conducted at Shimange and Mahlahluvani; this included one researcher accompanying a farmer on a five-kilometre walk to his plot in the early morning, labouring on the plot for the day, and walking back to the village in the evening laden with maize and pumpkins (see Appendix 2). For the 2006/07 agricultural year, selected farmers in all four group projects were issued with simple diaries, in which they recorded, using words and symbols, their agricultural activities over the year, including matters such as labour inputs, cash expenditure, volumes of crops consumed and volumes sold or stored.

Subsequently, these various data sources were analysed, largely using qualitative methods and employing descriptive statistics, where appropriate.

Policy engagement and dissemination

From the outset, the research team engaged actively with policy-makers and implementers in all

three spheres of government. Multiple meetings were held with officials of the DLA (Limpopo office), the office of the RLCC (Limpopo), the provincial DoA, the Vhembe and Capricorn district municipalities, and the Polokwane, Molemole and Makhado local municipalities. Meetings were also held with ward councillors from the various municipalities and with traditional leaders (chiefs and traditional councils) in all of the study areas. While these initially served to introduce the research and seek official input, they subsequently became opportunities for feeding back research findings and drawing official attention to the needs of project members.

In the second year of the project, two formal workshops were held at which the preliminary research results were presented to audiences made up of officials from various departments, local leaders of various kinds, representatives of local NGOs, other academic researchers and members of land reform projects. These workshops – conducted in Capricorn in November 2006 and in Vhembe in February 2007 – provided opportunities to engage directly with a policy audience on a wide range of issues arising from the research, as well as providing space for land reform participants to engage officials on their specific needs. A distinguishing feature of these workshops was the presence of farmers from all four research sites, and from other land reform projects in the respective districts. Farmers, as well as other participants, were able to

query the findings, add additional information of their own and engage with other stakeholders around the policy issues raised. Of particular importance, we believe, was the opportunity for farmers to challenge the DoA over its non-involvement in all four projects, and for officials of the department to hear at first hand about the challenges faced by land reform beneficiaries. These interactions led to a greater degree of engagement between farmers and officials than had been the case prior to our workshops.

Further dissemination of research results was carried out by means of presentation of papers at academic conferences, published reports and academic articles.³

Structure of the report

The chapters that follow present the findings of the Limpopo study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of land and land reform in Limpopo at the commencement of this research (2004/05). Chapters 3 to 6 present the results of the four in-depth case studies: Dikgolo, Monyamane, Mahlahluvani and Shimange. Chapter 7 presents detailed conclusions drawing from all four case studies, as well as recommendations for the reform of land reform policy. The appendices include a list of the organisations consulted during this research and a personal account by Marc Wegerif of a day spent in the field with farmers at Mahlahluvani.

³Published articles that drew at least in part from this work include Lahiff (2007), Manenzhe & Lahiff (2008) and Lahiff et al. (2006).

Chapter 2: Overview of land and land reform in Limpopo province

Historical background

White colonists settled in the area now known as the Limpopo province much later than in most other parts of the country, due to the distance from the coast and the stiff resistance they faced from the African kingdoms in the area. The Pedi, led by Chief Sekhukhune, resisted colonisation until they were defeated in 1879 by the British (Delius 1996). The Venda, led by King Makhado, used the Soutpansberg Mountains as a base from which to resist Afrikaner expansion, and forced a group of early settlers led by Paul Kruger to abandon the area and flee further south in 1867. The Afrikaners returned in the 1890s and continued attacks on the Venda people, until a force of over 4 000 settlers, assisted by Tsonga and Swazi allies, managed to storm the Venda stronghold in 1898 (Thompson 1995).

The late colonisation of Limpopo meant that, with few exceptions, land was surveyed and allocated to white owners only in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. In some areas of the far north and east of the province, this happened only after the 1913 date set as the cut-off for land claims in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994. Even where land was already under white ownership prior to 1913, many African communities continued to live on the land as if they were the owners, and remained there, often as labour tenants, until the mass removals under the apartheid regime in the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, large parts of the Limpopo province are now under restitution claims. The full extent of claims has not yet been mapped in all parts of the province, but in areas like the Makhado Municipality it has been found that over 90% of the land is under claim (Lahiff et al. 2006).

Three main ethnic groups lived in the area that is now the Limpopo province. Native reserves and later bantustans were established to accommodate these groups, resulting in three of the ten bantustans in South Africa being located in Limpopo. These were Lebowa for the Pedi,

Gazankulu for the Tsonga/Shangaan and Venda for the Venda. Venda gained 'independent' status under apartheid, while Gazankulu and Lebowa remained 'semi self-governing' territories. Land in all these bantustans remained largely state-owned and under the administration of traditional leaders who allocated land using various forms of 'permission to occupy'. A large number of forced removals took place to consolidate these bantustans and to ensure that they conformed to the regime's assessment of people's ethnic origins. Even in the 1980s, the apartheid regime was still acquiring land from white farmers for incorporation into these bantustans. Such land was legally owned by the South African Development Trust (SADT) and much of it was leased to white farmers or black politicians, while some was managed as state farms under the various bantustan state agricultural corporations. As late as 1993, some of these areas were still being incorporated into the bantustans in a last-ditch attempt to consolidate the power of conservative forces within the bantustan regimes and to win support in the run-up to the first democratic elections.

Socio-economic conditions

The Limpopo province is 123 600 km² in extent, and is bordered by Zimbabwe to the north, Mozambique to the east, Botswana to the west and the South African provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the North West in the south. It is the fifth largest of the nine South African provinces in area and the fourth largest in population, with approximately 5.3 million people at the time of the 2001 census. Around 2.4 million of the population are male, and 2.9 million female. More than 97% are black African, 0.2% coloured, 0.2% Indian or Asian, and 2.4% white (Stats SA 2003).⁴

Since December 2000, local government in Limpopo has been organised in a two-tier system, comprising indirectly elected district municipalities and, under them, directly elected local municipalities. Together, these municipalities are responsible for local development planning,

⁴This section was prepared during the inception phase of the study (2004/05) and is based largely on information current at that time.

infrastructural development and the delivery of services such as water and electricity, with the majority of such services being provided through the local municipalities. As may be seen in Map 2, Limpopo is divided into five district municipalities. Two districts feature in this study: Vhembe, located in the extreme north, adjacent to the border with Zimbabwe, and Capricorn in the middle, around the provincial capital of Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg). Vhembe, in turn, is subdivided into four local municipalities (Makhado, Musina, Thulamela and Mutale), while Capricorn is subdivided into five local municipalities (Polokwane, Lepele-Nkumpi, Blouberg, Aganang and Molemole).

In the past, more than two-thirds of the land in the province (approximately 87 000 km²) was allocated for white ownership and use, primarily commercial agriculture with some forestry and conservation (DBSA 1991). Farming on this land is carried out on approximately 2 915 commercial farming units (Stats SA 2004a). The former bantustans, with a total population of over 4.3 million people (81% of the total population of the province) occupied approximately 36 000 km², just under one-third of the land area, which accommodated approximately 299 000 small farmers.

Limpopo invariably ranks as either the poorest or the second-poorest province in the country, depending on the method used, and faces enor-

mous development challenges. It is the most rural province in the country, with approximately 89% of its population living in non-urban areas. Fewer than 10% of the households in the province have piped water, while a further 38% rely on public taps for their water supply; 59.5% of households use wood for cooking and heating. Limpopo has an unemployment rate of 48.8%, according to the 'narrow' definition used by Statistics South Africa, which includes only those actively seeking work and who could not find work at the time of the census. A closer analysis shows that only 22.7% of the population of working age (between the ages of 15 and 65) are actually in paid employment (Stats SA 2003).

The largest employment sector in the province is community, social and personal services, with 160 851 employees (Stats SA 2003). The second-largest employer is agriculture, forestry and fishing, with 118 118, followed by the wholesale and retail trade, with 92 222. Despite being very important as a contributor to the gross geographic product (GGP), mining employs only 28 020 people.

The majority of the population in the province (82.4%) are located in the former bantustans of Lebowa, Gazankulu and Venda, where they were forced to live on the basis of their ethnic origin (Stats SA 2003). Overcrowding in these areas resulted in soil erosion and the development of rural slums, the residents of which have lit-

Map 2: Limpopo province showing district municipalities



Source: Municipal Demarcation Board of South Africa (<http://www.demarcation.org.za/>)

the possibility of entering into paid employment. The situation is compounded by the large-scale exodus of men to the industrialised centres such as Gauteng in search of work (Wilson & Rample 1989). As a result, over 55% of the province's population is female. Children and youth make up the largest proportion of the population, with 52.6% being under the age of 20 (Stats SA 2003).

The 2001 census identified the size of the labour force (those aged 15 to 65) as 2 924 561 people. An astonishing 2 260 698 (77.3%) of them were 'not economically active', and 67% had no identifiable income. These people typically survive through mixed livelihood strategies, normally as part of extended household networks through which those few who do work or receive pensions provide support to others. Many households in the former bantustan areas engage in agriculture, but on a very small scale. According to the 2004 *Labour force survey*, 30% of African adults of working age were engaged in agriculture to some degree, although this rose to 53% in the Vhembe district (Stats SA 2004b). The data also reveal that the participation of Africans in agriculture in Vhembe is overwhelmingly of a subsistence nature. For those respondents who indicated that they had engaged in agriculture in the previous year, a relatively small proportion (1.7%) reported that agriculture was relied upon as a main source of food or income (see Table 1).⁵

The collection of firewood and other natural resources also makes a critical contribution to the survival of the poorest. Thus, small-scale (sub-subsistence) agriculture and access to natural resources constitute an important part of people's livelihood strategies, although the full value thereof has not been measured reliably and appears not to be captured in the official statistics.

Table 1: Main reasons for practicing agriculture, Vhembe district, 2004

Main reason	Number	Percent
Main source of food	3 057	0.8
Main source of income	6 708	1.7
Extra source of income	7 706	2.0
Extra source of food	369 433	95.2
As leisure activity	1 021	0.3
Total	387 926	100.0

Source: Stats SA (2004b)

The rural communities in the Limpopo province are characterised by a low degree of self-organisation, with weak and limited relations between the traditional authorities and the local government structures that were set up in 1995 and restructured in 1999. With one or two exceptions, neither the traditional authorities, nor the newly established democratic local government structures have engaged actively with the land reform programme. Generally, these structures have been ineffective in providing communities with information on development programmes and reforms, with the result that communities often do not know how to access the (limited) support available from the state (Lahiff 2000).

Land and agriculture in Limpopo

The Limpopo province has varied geography, rainfall and soil quality. In the fertile areas, agriculture is an important source of income; maize is the main crop, with fruit, vegetables, tea and cereals grown where possible. Cattle farming is practiced in the western and northern parts of the province where the rainfall is generally too low for cultivation (Kirsten 1996).

The N1 highway, running through the middle of the province on the way from Johannesburg to Zimbabwe, serves as a useful reference point for giving an overview of the different agricultural zones in Limpopo. Most of the route along, and to the west of, the N1 remains highveld until one crosses the Soutpansberg Mountains to the north. The area west of the N1 becomes drier and hotter as one approaches the Botswana border and the Limpopo river valley. This area has been used extensively for cattle farming and some dry-land cropping, but in recent years much of the land has been converted to game farming, for hunting or tourism, especially in the Waterberg District. Most of the area receives an average of less than 500 mm of rain annually, making it marginal (at best) for dry-land cropping. There are a few places where high-value crops such as citrus and table grapes are grown under irrigation, and large-scale potato farming occurs under irrigation around the Dendron area.

East of the N1 lies the escarpment and, below it, the lowveld. There is generally high rainfall along the escarpment; and the lowveld towards the Kruger National Park and the Mozambique border generally has higher rainfall and more fertile soil than the western part of the province.

⁵This section draws heavily on the work of Michael Aliber, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Most of the lowveld receives an annual rainfall of more than 500 mm and is suitable for growing crops like maize. Many large farms and estates in the lowveld grow high-value crops such as fruit for export. However, much of the land that borders the Kruger National Park is used for game farming, due to higher returns from tourism.

The southern area of Limpopo, to the east of the N1 but before the escarpment, has reasonable rainfall and good potential for dry-land crops such as maize. However, as most of the area is taken up by the former bantustan of Lebowa (now falling largely in the district of Sekhukhune), it is heavily populated and has suffered from extensive soil erosion over many decades, which has reduced agricultural productivity profoundly.

The southern slopes of the Soutpansberg Mountains have relatively rich soils and good rainfall. The villages of the former Venda bantustan that lie in this area have abundant fruit trees, and crops such as maize and groundnuts are grown. North of the Soutpansberg, the climate becomes extremely dry and hot as one descends into the Limpopo River valley.

There are two main areas of land of very high value in Limpopo, where subtropical conditions allow for the growing of export crops such as bananas, tea, avocados, mangoes and macadamia nuts. These are the Levubu valley just south of the Soutpansberg and east of Makhado, and the Letsitele valley area surrounding Tzaneen. Extensive citrus plantations have also been developed between the Letsitele and Blyde River valleys.

Almost all of Limpopo is frost-free, allowing for crops like tomatoes to be grown all year round, provided there is adequate water. There is large-scale tomato production in various parts of the province where sufficient underground water is to be found, notably around Moeketsi and on farms to the west of Musina along the Limpopo River.

Large-scale commercial farming in Limpopo generated a gross income of R3.8 billion for the year

ended February 2002 (see Table 2). This is almost a quarter of the provincial GGP of around R16 billion (1999 figures). The largest contributor to this income was horticulture, at R1.9 billion, followed by animals, at just over R1 billion. Field crops, which make up the largest part of South Africa's national farm income, amounted to only R640 million. These figures reflect the large contribution to the economy of irrigated horticulture on the pockets of high-value land, as well as the widespread grazing in much of the province where there is little potential for dry-land cropping or large-scale irrigation of field crops.

Employing 118 118 people in 2002, the agricultural sector is the largest employer outside the public sector (Stats SA 2003). Many of these workers live on farms with their families, while there are also people living on the farms who no longer work there. The 2001 census found a total of 308 348 people living on farms and smallholdings, but this figure is assumed to be conservative due to the difficulties of accessing farms and the high number of illegal immigrants, mostly from Zimbabwe, who are unlikely to be fully counted. It is common in Limpopo for families to have lived for generations on one farm. In many cases, people can trace their occupation of the same land to before the arrival of the first white settlers.

Conditions on farms in Limpopo are typical of those across the country, with farm residents and workers receiving extremely low wages and suffering under notoriously poor working conditions. A national study carried out in 2001 for the Department of Labour (DoL) found that 'children living on commercial farms are more likely to be stunted and underweight than any other children' (DoL 2001). A national survey carried out in 2004 found that illegal evictions of farm dwellers were rife in Limpopo (Wegerif, Russell & Grundling 2005).

Land reform in Limpopo

Land reform in Limpopo has faced challenges similar to those experienced in the rest of the country. The programme was slow to get started in the years after 1994, and those projects

Table 2: Gross farming income per type (R'1 000s)

Field crops	Horticulture	Animals	Animal products	Other	Total
640 020	1 898 086	1 078 622	145 201	49 125	3 811 054

Source: Stats SA (2004a)

that did get implemented under the SLAG programme in the period 1995–99 were often of a very poor standard, with reports of people dropping out and projects collapsing. A study of land reform in the then Northern Province at the end of 1998 identified widespread problems with the nature of project identification, ineffective land acquisition and inappropriate project planning (Lahiff 2000).

By mid-1998, four years into the new democratic dispensation, only three land redistribution projects had been implemented in the province, this figure rising to seven by the end of 1998 (Lahiff 2000). These projects were all on private land and appeared to have been initiated largely by the landowners. This contributed to inappropriate project design and poor group dynamics as people were grouped together to fit the land rather than land being found to fit the needs of an existing group or individuals. The tailoring of groups to the land was done in order to combine the grants of R15 000 (later increased to R16 000) per family into a total grant amount sufficient for the purchase price of the land. Unfortunately, this combining of grants was done with little consideration of other investments required for the farms to become productive. Generally, the land obtained for the groups was transferred into the name of a communal property associations (CPA), set up in terms of the Communal Property Association Act 28 of 1996, or a trust.

The state proved to be a very poor buyer of land, with long delays and uncertainties leading some owners who had been willing to sell to withdraw from deals. Project planning was largely inappropriate, involving little consultation with beneficiaries and no consideration of the beneficiaries' current skills and experience. There was also a strong emphasis on commercial farming, regardless of the interests and abilities of the beneficiaries, and no programme for building capacity amongst beneficiaries and their structures (Lahiff 2000).

By 2001, there had been a considerable increase in Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) delivery in terms of hectares and beneficiaries. In total, 71 SLAG projects had been implemented to the benefit of 6 655 households, which gained access to a total land area of 63 087 ha. Projects ranged in size from 9 to 724 members and from 26 to 22 500 ha, with an average size of 94 members and 889 ha. Most projects followed a similar pattern, with groups living in communal areas of the former bantustans pooling grants to pur-

chase a piece of land. The beneficiaries stayed in their existing homes, while the land acquired was to be used only for production, largely grazing and arable farming. In most groups, the majority of members were not involved in actual production and saw little benefit from the project.

Land reform for agricultural development

The policy of Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) began to be implemented from 2000 and, since then, has been the primary mechanism for land redistribution in Limpopo and the country as a whole. By the end of April 2005, a total of 138 LRAD projects, involving 1 183 beneficiaries, had been approved in Limpopo. These totals included projects implemented by the Land Bank using funds supplied by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA). Projects ranged in size from just one member to 203 members, although the great majority (83%) had ten or fewer members. Information on the total extent of land involved was not available at the time of research.

An in-depth study of LRAD projects in Limpopo carried out in 2003 found that more than 95.5% of the LRAD land was occupied and used by the beneficiaries before the 'land reform' project was initiated; and 82% was state land, which had been bought by the apartheid regime in the 1970s and 1980s for incorporation into the former bantustans (Wegerif 2004). Almost all of this land went to individual beneficiaries, rather than groups, and nearly all was used exclusively for cattle farming. A few group projects involved large numbers of beneficiaries, but constituted only a small percentage of land area transferred. Beneficiaries of group projects received an average of 8.2 ha per person, while beneficiaries of the individual projects received an average of 679 ha each.

Information supplied by the DLA for projects approved between 2003 and 2004 showed more of a mix of project types, including more projects that intended to undertake crop production. Most of the projects involved individuals or families gaining land. Many of these families were reported to be reasonably wealthy, with income from businesses, jobs or pensions, which contributed to reasonable levels of production on the transferred land.

Restitution

A total of 5 808 restitution claims were lodged in Limpopo in terms of the Restitution of Land

Rights Act. More than a thousand of these had been settled by 2004, the vast majority of which were urban claims settled by means of cash compensation to individual families.

The land claims situation in Limpopo differs from other provinces in terms of the large proportion of claims that are for rural land and the large area of land under claim. As the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC) made progress in investigating land claims and gazetted more and more claims, it became clear that in some areas of the province almost all land was under claim. This has caused consternation amongst land-owners and has brought home to all concerned the importance of ensuring that land is returned in a way that enables it to be used viably. It is not just the success of a few projects that is at stake, but the overall economy of a number of districts in the province.

By 1999/2000, only two claims had been settled in Limpopo, but subsequently the processes accelerated dramatically. By 31 March 2007, a total of 2 429 claims had been settled, involving the restoration of 356 042 ha of land at a direct cost (land only) of R1.3 billion and a total cost (including development grants and cash compensation) of R1.6 billion (CRLR 2007); although some uncertainty surrounds the precise number of claims settled by means of land restoration, it would appear to be in the order of 56.

Some of this land has been returned to communities for their own use, and a variety of agricultural projects are underway, but these have suffered from many of the same problems as the large SLAG projects. State-imposed development plans typically support operating the farms as single commercial entities but, in most cases, business planning and external support are inadequate to get such enterprises off the ground. This has led to widespread underutilisation of land and minimal benefit to members of such communities (PLAAS 2006).

Many claims in Limpopo are on land that is used at least partially as a game park or conservation area, for activities such as hunting, conservation purposes and tourism. There are also private game farms that are kept more for the lifestyle and leisure purposes of the owners rather than for commercial reasons. Claims on such land that have been settled so far are the Manavhela and Makuleke claims. Some claimants, such as at Kranspoort and Pheeha, also see potential in tourism activities on their land.

Much of the most productive and valuable land in Limpopo is under claim. In these areas, highly capitalised businesses produce crops for national supermarket chains and for export. By 2006, in the Levubu valley, approximately 5 382 ha of private land, in 63 parcels, had been purchased for seven claimant communities at a total cost of R219 million, and negotiations were at an advanced stage for the formation of strategic partnerships between communities and private sector investors (Derman, Lahiff & Sjaastad 2006). Similarly, large claims in the high-potential areas of Magoebaskloof and Hoodspruit were at an advanced stage.

In several areas there is commercial forestry land. The settlement of claims on such land has been caught up in a drive by the government to privatise forestry land held by the state. This has applied pressure for quicker resolution of the claims, with claimants being encouraged to enter into long-term lease agreements, which would allow the privatisation and operation of the forestry businesses even if the land is claimed or owned by communities.

The issue of access to mineral rights, or at least benefit from mining operations, is an important one for many communities on land, or claiming land, that is being mined. In the past, mining companies operating in communal areas tended to reach agreements with traditional leaders, and the communities saw little real benefit. As more land claims reach settlement and mines expand in certain of areas, this is becoming a more contentious issue. The strong performance of the platinum price over the last few years and its good long-term prospects have driven new mining developments in Limpopo. Much as the mines are expanding, they are always looking to cut costs, including trying to minimise any profit-sharing arrangements with communities and landowners, which would eat in to their profit margins. The Mining Charter presents an opportunity for communities to become partners in mining ventures on their land.

Land occupations

People, including members of land restitution claims who are frustrated by the slowness of the process, have occupied state land in a number of areas, especially where they believe their claims are strong. Worries about other developments that might occur on the land before the claim is settled have also sparked occupations. In the case of Munzhedzhi, for example, the occupa-

tion of the land was sparked by fears that the neighbouring township would be extended onto the land that the community saw as rightfully theirs.

Often, land occupations have been led by traditional leaders simply allocating people land. The pattern of land allocation and use has also reflected the norms in the communal areas – a large residential stand (normally bigger on the occupied land than that allocated in communal areas) for each family, arable plots for those households that require them, and communal access to grazing land for those who have livestock. There are no reports of occupations of private land in the province, although threats have been made by landless people that this could happen.

Post-settlement support

Although the DLA is the lead agency in the implementation of land reform in Limpopo, it does not take responsibility for post-settlement (or post-transfer) support of beneficiaries. This has fallen largely to the provincial Department of Agriculture (DoA) and, more recently, to the post-settlement unit (PSU) established by the Limpopo RLCC. As noted above, district and local municipalities, considered by many to be the most appropriate agencies for delivery of infrastructure and other services to land reform projects, have played little or no role in this area to date.

A PSU was established within the office of the Limpopo RLCC in 2002. This was the first such unit nationally, and it has served as an example and driving force behind getting the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) as a whole to look more seriously at issues of post-settlement support. By 2005, the unit had ten staff members in the Limpopo RLCC office in Polokwane. Practical functions of the PSU include the commissioning and approval of business plans and the administration and release of grants. While the unit has worked to improve the quality of business plans, the plans remain largely unused by the communities concerned. The management of grants from one provincial office has also proved to be unworkable. The grants are only

released for approved purchases to the supplier in terms of business plans and quotes obtained. Many claimants whose claims were settled even three years ago have still not received the grants that they are entitled to. These grants have become the remaining leverage that the RLCC has to control the claimants, and tend to be used to discourage actions by the claimants that do not conform with approved plans.

The provincial DoA also has a key role to play in providing support to land reform beneficiaries in order to assist them to make effective use of their land. Responsibility for this area falls to the Directorate of Farmer Settlement, Research and Education, which has established good co-operation with the RLCC, especially the PSU. However, the co-operation does not yet extend to the district and local offices of the DoA, where there is still little co-ordination with land reform initiatives. There is a general assumption on the part of the DLA and the RLCC that the provincial DoA will provide support to beneficiaries of land redistribution (including successful land claimants), but there is no system yet in place to check what specific support will be required and whether the department has the resources and appropriate skills to meet the needs.

When a number of communities received their land back through the land claims process in 2001 and 2002, the DoA felt a need to provide some kind of support but, at the time, had no appropriate systems in place. As a stopgap measure, driven largely by political considerations, each of the 11 communities that had received land was given what the MEC for agriculture referred to as a 'starter pack' consisting of a tractor and some implements to go with it

In 2004, the provincial DoA began implementing the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP), designed to provide an improved package of support for land reform beneficiaries and other previously disadvantaged farmers. The amount available in the first year – just R9 million for the entire province – is clearly inadequate for the needs of land reform, especially if the pace of settling land claims really does increase as planned.

Chapter 3: Dikgolo case study

Background

The Dikgolo Trust is a group of people from the Dikgale tribal area, in the former homeland of Lebowa, who came together to purchase land via the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) of the Department of Land Affairs (DLA). Members of the group had settled in the villages of Dikgale and Ga-Mokgopo as a result of apartheid-era forced removals from surrounding farms. Dikgale is in an area of relatively low rainfall, marginal for the production of rain-fed maize. Relatively high densities of human population and livestock mean that there are few opportunities for grazing in the area. Dikgale now forms part of the Capricorn district of the Polokwane municipality.

The first steps towards acquiring land for the people of Dikgale were taken by their traditional leader, Chief Dikgale, who, in 1996/97, encouraged all members of the community who were interested in acquiring land to register their names at the tribal authority office. Many people registered their names, and they sought assistance from the Nkuzi Development Association in advancing their application for a SLAG land reform grant.

When people first registered their names with the tribal authority, they were hoping to acquire land on which they could produce food for their households and, in some cases, for residential purposes. Members of the Dikgolo Trust reported that they thought they were going to have access to their own ploughing field of perhaps a hectare, close to their home, and it was not their intention to take over a whole farm, even as a group. For others, however, the opportunity to purchase a farm exceeded their expectations:

I wanted land so that I could leave an inheritance for my children, something that they could work on and get food, without having to seek to be employed by someone. (Elizabeth Matole, Dikgolo)

One thing I needed was to own a piece of land and now I own one and am able to produce from it and feed my house and relatives. (Pricilla Ntsutsa, Dikgolo)

In April 1998, the Nkuzi Development Association applied to the Community Facilitation and Support Fund (CFSF) of the DLA to facilitate the project through to the point of approval of SLAG funding. At the beginning, 160 potential beneficiaries were identified, and the Dikgale Community Development Project was registered with the DLA. In order to make the process more manageable, the membership was divided into four groups, which called themselves Dikgale, Dikgele, Dikgolo and Dikgulu. The decision to do so was influenced by DLA officials, who encouraged applicants to form groups of a size that would (at R16 000 per qualifying household) yield sufficient grants to correspond in value to specific targeted properties.

All four Dikgale groups were interested in acquiring land adjacent to their tribal area, partially for convenience but also because they had a sense of historical claim on that land, having been forcibly dispossessed of it in the past. Nkuzi requested a local estate agent to source land in the area that might be available for purchase and to negotiate with private landowners. Portion 8 of Nooitgedacht farm was earmarked for the Dikgolo group, and other Dikgale groups targeted portions of the neighbouring Rietpol farm.

The Dikgolo Trust and its members

Officially, the Dikgolo Trust has 65 beneficiaries, who refer to themselves as members.⁶ Members reported that a number had dropped out of the project at an early stage and that, in fact, there were only 47 active members. During the course of the research (an extended period from 2005 until 2007), however, only 39 active members could be identified. Therefore, the number of respondents for the Dikgolo case study was 39.

Of this group, 30 were women and nine were men. The age profile of members was slightly younger than at Mahlahluvani and considerably younger than at Monyamane: 21 members were in the range of 40–59 years, 15 were aged 60 or over, and just three were in their thirties. The average age of members was 55. All the members in the sample described themselves as unemployed.⁷

⁶ The Dikgolo Business Plan makes reference to a total of 87 members, but it appears that only 65 were approved for grant purposes.

⁷ One member dropped out of the project just as the research began, because he had obtained a full-time job in Polokwane, but the plot was taken over by his wife.

The size of members' households were larger, on average, than those in any of the other case studies. Households of members at Dikgolo ranged in size from two to 11 members, with an average of 6.2 members. Most households (30 of the 39) contained at least one child (under 18), with the average number of children being 2.1. Most households (25) had between two and five adults, with four having just one adult (all women) and ten households containing six adults. Seven households contained no adult male. One household, the largest in the sample, was comprised entirely of adults, the youngest member being 18 years of age. Roughly half of the households (18 out of 39) did not contain a person aged 60 or over; 17 households reported having one pensioner; and two households reported having two and three pensioners, respectively.

Nine members of the group lived at Ga-Mogopa (or Mokgopo) village, and 30 at Dikgale village. Of the total of 39, 33 had joined the project during its initial set-up in 1997/98, and first cultivated their land in 1999. Six others had joined the project later, but it would appear that all of these were replacements for earlier members (i.e. family members) who had either dropped out or passed away. The names of all current members are recorded in the minutes kept by the group, but there appeared to be no formal process of updating the records of the Dikgolo Trust with the names of replacement members. This did not appear to be a problem for the members, but could potentially lead to difficulties in the event of a dispute over membership or the composition of the trust in the future.

A total of 22 members (56%) said they had access to arable land prior to joining the project, ranging from 0.1 ha to 5 ha, or an average of 1.42 ha for those with such land. A total of 11 households reported owning cattle, ranging from two to 12 head, with an average herd size of 5.4 head. Seven members reported using communal grazing at Dikgale for grazing their livestock during the past year, eight reported using the Dikgolo

project land for their own livestock, and four used both lands. Nine households owned goats (maximum herd size of 11) and six households reported owning chickens (maximum flock size of 10). Two members owned sheep (5 and 32 head, respectively) and two member owned donkeys (4 and 15, respectively). All livestock other than cattle were kept on residential stands or communal land at Dikgale, rather than on the land of the Dikgolo Trust.

Farmers at Dikgolo reported a wide range of household cash incomes, ranging from zero to R15 000 per month. Twenty-four households received less than R4 000 per month, and 15 households received more than this. The average non-farm cash income was R3 139, higher than at Mahlahluvani or Monyamane but less than at Shimange. When calculated on a per capita basis (i.e. allowing for differences in household size), however, the average income at Dikgolo was slightly less than that at Monyamane (see Table 3).

The Dikgolo Trust, the nominal owner of the land, appears to exist in name only, as none of the members could name the trustees or were aware of the function of the trust. Day-to-day management of the project is in the hands of an elected committee of five. The group appears to be cohesive and the committee is supported by the membership, as evidenced by attendance at meetings and work parties and by the commitment to new communal activities such as building a house and poultry sheds, and preparation of a vegetable garden (see below).

Members of Dikgolo are expected to work for two days a week on collective activities, such as the construction of a chicken house, preparation of the vegetable garden, fencing and herding cattle, although during busy periods this is reduced as people spend more time on their own plots. In addition, they are required to contribute R5 per month to pay two full-time cattle herders (who are also members of the group).

Table 3: Household cash income from all activities, excluding the land reform projects/ initiatives

Case study	Total non-project cash income (R per month)	Household size (average per case study)	Average per capita income (R)
Dikgolo	3 139	6.2	506
Mahlahluvani	1 809	5.4	335
Monyamane	2 822	4.9	576
Shimange	5 541	4.8	1 154

The legal status of the group and its members is an ongoing concern for Dikgolo, and is exacerbated by recent statements by provincial politicians. The original Dikgolo Trust had 65 members, and the currently active members (variously reported as between 39 and 47 members), who form a reasonably cohesive and united group, are worried that the inactive members may make a claim on the land or, worse, on the fruits of their efforts, at some point in the future. As there is no known way of resigning from the trust (most members said they had never seen the deed of trust), the status of these inactive members, who appear simply to have dropped out when it became apparent that no immediate cash benefits would flow to members, is unclear. Members are also apprehensive about the so-called deregistration drive being organised by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (DoA), fearing that it may lead to disputes between active and inactive members or to some of the currently active members being 'deregistered' against their will.

Land description

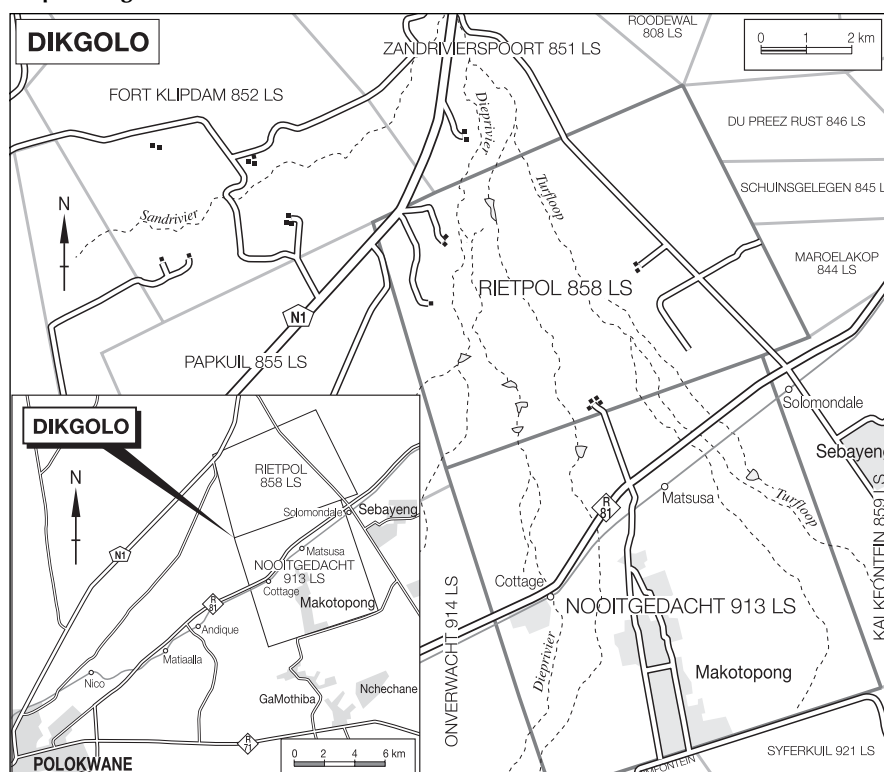
Portion 8 of the farm Nooitgedacht 913 LS is 590.5401 ha in extent. The farm is located approximately 50 km north-east of Polokwane on the Mogjadjiskloof road (R81) and approximately 20 km away from where the members reside. The DLA purchased the land on 1 Novem-

ber 2000, and it was registered in the name of Dikgolo Trust on 16 January 2001 (deed number T2792/2001). The total cost of the land, including transfer costs, was R1 000 751, out of a total grant of R1 040 000 made up of 65 grants of R16 000 each. As far as could be established, no further discretionary grants were awarded to the trust.

According to the Dikgolo Business Plan, average annual rainfall at Nooitgedacht is 411 mm, making it highly marginal for rain-fed maize production. Groundwater potential, however, is reported as 'high', sufficient to irrigate upwards of 60 ha.⁸ Vegetation is described as Acocks' Mixed Bushveld, and the veld as being in good condition. The farm is divided into nine grazing camps, of between 39 and 75 ha, with gazing capacities ranging between 2.5 and 6 ha per large stock unit. This was considered adequate for 148 large stock units (e.g. cattle) in all, or 105 cattle and 100 goats.

At the time of purchase, the land was being used solely for grazing cattle. On this farm, there is a small concrete dam, which is fed from a borehole, using a wind pump. At first, water was pumped to drinking troughs in each of the camps using a diesel pump, but the pump was stolen in the early months of the project. At the transfer of the land, grazing camps were all fenced, but much of the fencing has since fallen into disrepair.

Map 3: Dikgolo



⁸ 'Business Plan for Dikgolo Trust'. Unpublished document. Prepared by Index, Johannesburg, dated March 1999: 'The central area has a high water table and, because of the high nutrient content, yields large quantities of veld grazing of an excellent quality' (p. 6).

Some confusion emerged in the course of the research around the formal ownership of the Dikgolo land. According to the members, and official maps of the area, the land parcel occupied by the Dikgolo Trust is Portion 8 of Nooitgedacht 913 LS. According to the Deeds Registry in Pretoria, however, this parcel is registered in the name of the Dikgale Trust (see Table 4). The Dikgale Trust and two other similarly named trusts occupy portions of the neighbouring farm, Rietpol 858 LS. As the members of the Dikgolo Trust are adamant that they purchased Nooitgedacht 913, which is the land they currently occupy, it would appear that some confusion occurred at the point when the details were entered at the Deeds Registry. As members of Dikgolo were unaware of the precise entry in the Deeds Registry, this had never been a problem for them (or, seemingly, for their neighbours, although this was not verified for fear of provoking anxiety). It could, however, be a problem in the future should it be necessary to mortgage the land or in the event of a dispute over ownership.

It also potentially complicates the provincial DoA's delivery of support services, which were virtually non-existent anyway. All five portions occupied by Dikgale people lie immediately to the north-east of the R81 road, which is seen locally as the boundary between the Polokwane municipal area (to the south-west of the road) and the Molemole municipal area (to the north-east of the road). This is significant, because municipal boundaries serve as the basis for delivery of services by local offices of the DoA. In fact, the municipal boundary does not follow the road, but is defined in terms of original farm boundaries. Officials from Polokwane and Molemole both reported that they were under the impression that Nooitgedacht 8 lay outside their area of responsibility, and cited this as a reason for not having delivered extension services to the project over the previous six years. By 2006, how-

ever, there appeared to be general agreement that the Dikgolo portion of the farm Nooitgedacht lay within the Molemole local municipality.

Land use

As part of the grant application process, the members of the Dikgolo Trust were required to prepare a business plan. In 1998, the provincial land reform office of the DLA appointed a Johannesburg-based consultancy firm called Index to do this.

The resulting business plan proposed an elaborate project structure, comprising small plots for cultivation by individual members and a range of other enterprises to be operated collectively by the group. A management committee would take responsibility for overall farm management and provide support to farmers on the individual plots. It was also envisaged that the project would appoint a full-time farm manager. As is common with such business plans, however, it had little chance of being implemented given the relatively small size and poor quality of the land involved and the general lack of capital and business skills among the members. Moreover, the members reported that they did not understand the business plan and it appeared to be far removed from their actual needs and aspirations. Project members reported that they were consulted only superficially during its preparation and that their stated needs were not taken into consideration.

According to the business plan, an area of 44 ha would be allocated for irrigated cropping, which would be leased to individual members in 0.5 ha plots. The plan proposed that a centralised irrigation infrastructure for the 44 ha be installed over a period of three years, starting with 15 ha in the first year. In addition, the land would be divided into a total of nine grazing camps (of between 39

Table 4: Property ownership according to the Deeds Registry*

Property name	Portion	Ha	Owner	Local municipality
Nooitgedacht 913 LS	8	590.5401	Dikgale Trust	Polokwane
Rietpol 858 LS	25	280.4559	Dikgulu Trust	Molemole
Rietpol 858 LS	27	56.9319	Dikgulu Trust	Molemole
Rietpol 858 LS	29	318.9168	Dikgele Trust	Molemole
Rietpol 858 LS	28	616.2593	Dikgolo Trust	Molemole

* Note: Accessed 10 May 2002.

and 75 ha each) covering a total area of 548 ha, with 5 ha remaining for packing sheds, borehole and pump, storerooms and other infrastructure. The total capital requirement for setting up such an operation was calculated at R537 000, most of which would not be covered by the SLAG grant (calculated on the basis of 87 members) (see Table 5). Thus, the business plan assumes that the project would access loan finance from the Land Bank or another commercial lender, and would receive revenue from its members for the rental of plots and equipment.

According to the plan, a collectively owned cattle herd would be run as a commercial venture by a so-called central management unit: a herd size of 145 large stock units on 548 ha of grazing land was recommended. A small herd would be acquired from the balance of the SLAG grant left over after the land was purchased, and this herd was expected to increase naturally over time.

A total grant of R1 040 000 was made available to the trust. Of this, R1 000 751 was spent on the purchase of the land, leaving a balance of R39 249. A limited amount of development took place on the farm following acquisition, using this funding. A new borehole was drilled and a diesel pump was installed, but the pump was soon stolen as there was no one residing on the farm to guard it at night or on weekends. Some repairs were made to the cattle troughs and the fencing of various camps. In the absence of a diesel pump, the farmers continued to rely on the old wind pump that was on the farm when they moved there, and which still functions. A herd of 17 cattle was purchased. No attempt was made to install irrigation for cropping (at least, not until 2006), due to a lack of working capital, a lack of appropriate knowledge on the part of the members and a lack of support from external bodies.

Of particular significance in this project, as in many others, is that people do not live on the land they have acquired. According to the busi-

ness plan, only two members of the project expressed a desire to settle on the property. This is contrary to what the majority of beneficiaries reported during our research. Commuting to and from the land every day was cited by members as a major barrier to effective use of their land, and most said they would relocate to the land, or at least stay there during the week, if suitable housing and services were available. During the time when the grant was being approved, and the business plan being prepared, officials of the DLA and the DoA reportedly were adamant that settlement of people on the farm would not be tolerated. Since then, occasional comments by senior officials and political leaders of the provincial government have reinforced this position, to the point where members of the group no longer see settlement on the land as an option.

At the time of research, activities on the Dikgolo project centred around dry-land cropping on individual plots, and collective management of a cattle herd, while attempts were being made to develop a collective vegetable garden under a rudimentary form of irrigation. The following sections consider each of these activities in turn.

Individual cropping

Each member of the Dikgolo project is allocated a dry-land plot for cultivation, which members referred to as being two hectares in extent but, when measured by the researchers, turned out to be approximately one hectare (i.e. approximately 100 m²). Plots are clearly demarcated (but not fenced), and remain in the possession of the same member from year to year. All but one of the members had cultivated a crop during the agricultural year under investigation (2005/06); the remaining member had not ploughed at all that year. All those who cultivated grew maize as their main crop. In addition, 22 members also grew various squashes (predominantly watermelons and butternuts), three grew beans ('dry

Table 5: Infrastructure requirement according to the Dikgolo Business Plan

Item	Unit cost	Unit required	Units	Total cost (R)
<i>Building & equipment</i>				
Irrigation equipment	10 000	44	Ha	440 000
Borehole	60 000	1	Each	60 000
Shed	12 000	1	Each	12 000
Office	25 000	1	Each	25 000
Total (R)				537 000

beans’) and three grew groundnuts. Sixteen members grew only maize, nine grew maize and one other crop and 12 members grew maize plus two or more other crops. Maize seed is broadcast by hand over the entire plot in all cases, and other crops are intercropped amongst the maize.

Members are responsible for all aspects of production on their allocated plots, and are free to grow what crops they like (or even whether to cultivate at all in a particular year). Ploughing of members’ plots is done at the beginning of the season using a tractor hired from a local private operator, and paid for out of group funds. This is one of the main expenses for the group, and effectively the only direct subsidy to the members. The drawbacks of using a hired tractor and operator for ploughing – perceived to be unreliable, costly and poorly executed – give rise to a strong desire by members to own a tractor of their own.

Apart from ploughing and the members’ own labour, inputs to the arable plots are minimal. Members occasionally work on each other’s plots, while additional labour is supplied by household members or, less frequently, by hired workers. Of the 39 active members, 12 reported that they worked their plots on their own, 23 said that household members assisted, and 11 said that they occasionally employed non-household members (with six respondents using both household and non-household labour). Hired labour is usually paid for by the day or at a fixed rate for particular tasks, typically weeding. The standard rate paid for casual labour was R30 per day.

For their maize crop, farmers use either retained seed or seed purchased from the NTK shop in Polokwane or from a general store in their village. Of the 38 who planted maize, 16 reported using retained seed, while 22 used purchased seed, for which they paid between R40 and R780 (an average expenditure of R199 for those using purchased seed). Examples of other purchased seed were beans (for R30) and groundnuts (for R380).

Minimal use is made of purchased pesticides or chemical fertilisers. Members do, however, apply

cattle dung, which they gather themselves from the pastures and carry to their plots in buckets or wheelbarrows. Just eight farmers reported using chemical fertiliser, for which they paid between R90 and R360 (or an average of R189 for the farmers involved), suggesting application rates (for one hectare) well below recommended levels. Just one farmer reported using a purchased pesticide, ‘Blue Death’, which cost R135 and was used to combat insect pests in maize.

Individual farmers produce almost exclusively for household consumption, as shown by the choice of crops, the relatively small scale of production and limited use of inputs. Relatively small amounts of surplus are shared with relatives or neighbours, or are sold at local informal markets; just nine farmers (23.1%) reported selling any crops in the previous year.

The amount of maize produced by farmers at Dikgolo in the study year is summarised in Table 6. Most farmers (27 out of 39) harvested less than 500 kg, which was below the amount of maize required for consumption within the household over the year. Eleven farmers harvested between 500 kg and 1 000 kg, and one farmer harvested 1 280 kg (1.3 tonnes). The average per farmer was 255 kg. All statistics on maize yields refer to the ‘final’ harvest when cobs are dried and used (or sold) for maize meal. Substantial volumes of ‘green mealies’ are harvested on a continuing basis in the months before the ‘final’ harvest and are eaten fresh on the cob (after boiling or roasting).

In terms of meeting household maize meal needs, 19 producers obtained less than half their household needs, 14 obtained between 50% and 100%, and five obtained more than their annual needs.⁹ The highest proportion was 200% of a household’s maize requirements, and the average for the group as a whole was 61%. This is higher than the result for Shimange¹⁰ and much higher than Monyamane, but less than half the figure for Mahlahlalani (see following chapters). Of these cases, the most relevant comparison is with Monyamane, which is broadly in the same agro-ecological zone. Average annual rainfall at Nootgedacht is 411 mm, according to the business plan, and even less at Monyamane. Factors

⁹ Based on the formula of 160 kg per adult and 80 kg per child per annum. This serves as an estimate, providing a rough indication of the contribution of maize production to household food needs (see Lahiff 2000b: 192).

¹⁰ When compared to active farmers at Shimange, not all of whom grew maize. When non-growers are excluded, the average for Shimange rises to 103%, the highest for any of the case studies.

Table 6: Maize harvested per farmer from individual plots, Dikgolo

	0–199 kg	200–499 kg	500–1 000 kg	>1 000 kg
Number of farmers	9	18	11	1

that contribute to the relatively good average yields of maize at Dikgolo include the suitability of the terrain (flat, without obstacles), universal use of a tractor for ploughing, frequency of attendance in fields by the farmers, mobilisation of household labour and the fact that virtually all members actually grew maize.

Maize cultivation typically begins with preparation of the soil in November, when household members (including children) assist in removing stubble and weeds from the plots. Ploughing, using the tractor hired from a private operator in Dikgale, usually occurs in December or early January, and is followed immediately by planting of maize and other crops. Weeding usually begins towards the end of February and continues until crops are mature. By the end of March, farmers are already eating some of the produce, such as sweet reeds, watermelon and green cobs of maize. The main harvest of maize and other crops takes place in May and June.

Farmers at Dikgolo are conscious of the relatively low yields they are achieving, particularly of maize, which they ascribe to low levels of inputs

and unreliable rainfall. Those who can afford to purchase fertiliser and pesticide say that they are reluctant to do so because of what they perceive as the high risk of crop failure due to drought. Another obstacle to production, in the opinion of many, is the limited time spent on the farm, due to reliance on public transport. The only bus from Dikgale to Polokwane, which is used by the majority of farmers, drops them on the road next to the farm at 8: 30 every day and passes back again at 14: 00.

Cattle

To date, the cattle herd has been the main collective enterprise of the Dikgolo group, although day-to-day operations are largely in the hands of the male members. The Dikgolo Trust purchased 17 Nguni cattle (16 cows and one bull) in 2001 with the remainder of the SLAG grant obtained from the DLA. By July 2005, the herd had grown to 50 head, including calves, and six head had been sold off. By May 2007, a further 12 cattle had been sold and the total herd size stood at 59 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Dikgolo cattle diary, July 2006 to May 2007

Date	Event	Amount (R)	Total herd size	Comment
06.07.06	1 bull sold for funeral	2 500	56	
01.09.06	1 bull sold for funeral	3 000	55	
06.09.06	1 bull sold for funeral	3 500	53	
25.09.06	1 calf died		52	
28.09.06	1 bull sold	3 300	51	
04.10.06	1 cow died in birth		50	
09.10.06	1 calf born		51	
25.10.06	1 calf born		52	
09.11.06	1 bull sold		50	
18.11.06	2 bulls sold for funeral	6 400 (2 x 3 200)	48	
22.11.06	1 bull sold for funeral	3 500	47	
11.12.06	Herd count		59	44 adults, 15 calves
11.12.06	3 bulls sold, for funeral and party	10 000 (3 000; 3 500; 3 500)	56	
12.12.06	1 bull sold	3 500	55	
16.12.06	1 bull sold	3 300	54	
10.01.07	5 calves born		59	
29.01.06	1 calf died		58	
19.02.07	2 calves died		56	
19.03.07	3 calves born		59	
02.05.07	Herd count		59	38 cows, 2 bulls, 19 calves

Two members of the group, both men, are employed to look after the cattle, and are paid R200 per month. This money comes from a levy of R5 per month payable by all members, and is topped up from group funds if necessary. The men's tasks involve herding, repairing fences, dipping and spraying. These herdsmen also play a useful role as security guards, because they are usually the only members of the project to stay overnight on the farm. Other members of the group assist with tasks such as herding and the repairing of fences, although local custom prohibits young women from undertaking certain tasks, such as collecting dung from the kraal.

Cattle are sold mostly in ones and twos to local people for funerals, weddings and other social occasions. In 2006, the group bartered six cows for a bakkie (pick-up truck), which they used for transporting members from the village to the farm, but the bakkie was returned to its former owner, and the cows taken back by the members, because they felt the vehicle was not in good condition and did not represent a satisfactory deal.

Twelve head of cattle were sold between July 2006 and May 2007, bringing the total off-take since the project began to 18. This excludes the cattle that were bartered for the bakkie and later returned. Cattle sales have generated a gross income of R39 000, or R1 000 per active member, since the project began. As the first three or four years were spent establishing the herd, however, this income (and this off-take) effectively has been over a period of approximately three years. Cash from cattle sales is used for general project expenses such as tractor hire, petrol for the bakkie (for the time they had it), fencing materials, diesel for the water pump, pipes and the purchase of vaccines and sprays for the cattle. As far as could be established, none of the income from cattle sales was paid out to members in cash.

At the time of research, only two out of the nine grazing camps were being used for the group-owned herd, due largely to the poor state of fencing and lack of water points on the other camps. Some members, however, have been given permission by the group to bring their own livestock onto the property. Eleven of the 39 active members of the group reported that they or somebody in their household owned cattle. Altogether, these 11 households owned 59 cattle. Eight out of 11 reported grazing their cattle on the Dikgolo land during the past year, and

four of these had used only this land. Thus, these members had brought 48 head of cattle onto the land at various times, and they had been grazed separately from the collectively owned herd. Individual owners are responsible for the care of their own livestock, and especially for keeping them away from arable areas during the growing season.

Some of the members at Dikgolo, especially the men, have prior experience of cattle farming, but overall they feel they lack sufficient skills to manage their herd effectively and have difficulty accessing any support or veterinary services. In March 2006, the researchers learned that four newborn calves had died from an unknown disease. Farmers reported the matter to the extension officers in Mankweng, but were told that they should be served by the Molemole District DoA (with which they had never been in contact) and so were left without assistance.

Limited evidence was found of integration of cattle and crop farming at Dikgolo. A minority of project members reported collecting cattle dung from the veld for use as fertiliser in their individual arable plots, and this appeared to be unconnected to ownership of cattle. Greater use of dung was made in the collective vegetable garden, especially in the initial set-up, when deep trenching methods were used. No cattle, either collectively or privately owned, were used for ploughing or other forms of traction. Both categories of cattle were, however, grazed on post-harvest stubble across all arable plots.

Communal maize plot

At the outset of the project, a plot of approximately four hectares was set aside for the communal production of maize. According to the business plan, all members would contribute their labour, and the harvest would be sold and the income invested in the broader project. In practice, the communal plot has failed to produce any yield to date, due to a number of factors. Members tend to give priority to their individual plots, especially during peak season, leading to the neglect of the communal plot. More importantly, however, the plot is located at the farm boundary, close to a neighbouring village, and it was reported that villagers allow their livestock to graze in the maize field. As a result of these setbacks, the plot was not cultivated at all in 2006, and the idea of communal production of maize seems to have been abandoned by the group.¹¹

¹¹ It was suggested by various sources that people who originally occupied the farms Rietpol and Nootgedacht had been forcibly relocated to the South African Development Trust (SADT) land that had been added to the jurisdiction of Chief Dikgale in the 1960s. The efforts by Chief Dikgale to acquire additional land for his people, which led to the establishment of the four SLAG projects, targeted mainly the residents of the older tribal areas of Dikgale and excluded the residents of the SADT land (including the township of Makotopong). These people, it was suggested, believed that they have a prior claim to this land, although no restitution claim was lodged on it. It was suggested that this is the source of the animosity between the Dikgolo project and the residents of the adjoining SADT land, but the assertion could not be verified.

Natural resource harvesting

Members of Dikgolo make use of a variety of natural resources they find on their land, but not in a systematic way and not for commercial gain. Various wild fruits and herbs are collected, mainly for consumption while people are working on the farm. Wood is gathered for use in pick and hoe handles and for firewood. In the early years of the project, members collected as much firewood as they needed. More recently, efforts have been made to limit the amount used, although members are entitled to a bakkie-load of wood if they have a special event at their home, such as a wedding or a funeral. Members are supposed to pay for any other firewood they collect, but this rule does not appear to be enforced in practice. The main limitation on the harvesting of firewood is the need for motor transport to carry it to members' home villages. Wooden poles are cut on the farm for fencing the vegetable garden, and gaps are filled with cut branches and bushes. Thatching grass is cut on the farm, but only a minority of members have need of this, as most houses at Dikgale now have tin roofs. A variety of wild birds, pigs, rabbits and buck are hunted on the farm, particularly by the men who stay there during the week looking after the cattle, but this is a relatively rare occurrence. The skins of wild animals, as well as the skins of calves and cattle that are slaughtered or die of illness, are used as mats or wall-hangings in people's houses, and are made into straps for restraining cattle during branding.

Recent developments: Poultry and vegetable projects

In 2005, work began on a number of new activities, with financial and technical assistance from Nkuzi and funds accessed from the National Development Agency (NDA). These include the preparation of a vegetable plot of approximately five hectares, which is to be fenced and irrigated via a pump and underground pipes from the main borehole, and the construction of two poultry sheds. The group also began work on the construction of a house for the accommodation of farmers during the day, or if they need to stay overnight on the farm, as well as sheds for storage of equipment and supplies, using funds from the sale of cattle and vegetables.

By early 2007, the house had been finished and was in daily use, but neither the vegetable garden nor the poultry project was yet in full production. In contrast to the various activities pro-

posed in the original business plan, however, all of these recent activities would appear to have the support of project members and to be in line with their interests and abilities. The input of considerable labour by all (or most) members, over a period of approximately two years, would also suggest a high level of commitment and determination to make these activities succeed.

During 2005, the vegetable plot was fenced, the land cultivated and an underground pipe laid, but by May 2007 the group was still waiting for the installation of a pump that would deliver water to their field. In the meantime, small areas of cabbage, onions and carrots were being watered by hosepipe and watering can, using the limited supply that came from the borehole. The initial work of clearing the land was done by both men and women, but since then the work of preparing seedbeds, planting out seedlings, watering and weeding has been done exclusively by women, while men have assisted with the fencing. The women work according to a rota, each contributing two days labour per week. At the end of 2005, every member received a bunch of vegetables for their own consumption, and a small surplus was sold to the public at the roadside, with income going into the group account for the purchase of more seed.

During 2005, two poultry sheds were erected using funds supplied by Nkuzi and the NDA. However, a dispute with a supplier led to lengthy delays in the delivery of fencing wire and other materials. By early 2007, the poultry sheds were largely completed but had not yet been stocked.

Support services

The Dikgolo project is run with minimal support from external institutions and is poorly integrated into systems of local government in the area. Institutions that were involved with the project at some stage include the provincial DoA, the DLA, the Nkuzi Development Association and the University of Limpopo, through its outreach programme. Currently, the only organisation that is actively involved is Nkuzi, which is providing training and funding for expansion of the operations on the farm in vegetable and poultry production.

The DLA was involved in the purchase of the farm, the purchase of livestock and the formation of the trust. Since then (i.e. since about 2001), however, the DLA has not provided any support to the project, in terms of either capac-

ity building for the group or support for productive activities.

The Limpopo DoA is responsible, in theory, for the provision of extension and animal health services to land reform projects such as Dikgolo. At the beginning of the project, veterinary officials visited the project and gave advice on vaccination and spraying of cattle, but have not visited the project in recent years.¹² According to project members, the last time an agricultural official visited them (prior to 2006) was in 2004, when a local extension officer came to take soil samples. Three years later, he had still not returned with the results.

The Nkuzi Development Association worked closely with the Dikgale Tribal Authority in the 1990s to identify land for the community and to access land reform grants from the DLA. In 2004, Nkuzi obtained financial resources through the NDA, which allowed it to provide support to a number of land reform projects in Limpopo. Nkuzi organised training for the committee members on leadership, financial management and agricultural production, and provided funding for the establishment of a poultry house and the purchase of a diesel pump (to supply water to the grazing camps and to the new vegetable plot).

Members have also received once-off training, particularly in the dehorning of cattle, at the experimental farm attached to the University of Limpopo.

The Polokwane Local Municipality does not have a policy of providing support to land reform projects in its area, and land reform does not feature in either its Local Economic Development (LED) or Integrated Development Plan (IDP) processes. The local ward councillor stated that he was aware of the Dikgolo project, but did not know of any way that he could assist it. The Dikgolo committee reported that they were interested in having an electrical connection to the farm, but did not know who they could approach in this regard.

In October 2006, after repeated requests to meet with the area management of the DoA, ideally at the Dikgolo property, a senior official visited the farm. All the members of the project, along with the researchers, gathered in the partially built chicken shed to meet with the official and express their needs. What ensued, however, was a 45-minute lecture by the official, speaking in English, outlining the department's planning

and budgeting cycles and the elaborate initiatives the department was pursuing to support projects such as this. Repeated mention was made of the department's policy of 'massification', of the need to 'restructure' SLAG projects and the possibility of introducing 'strategic partners' from the private sector in order to establish projects on a more commercial footing. At no point did the official make any reference to the virtual absence of the department from this project since its inception, nor did he ask the project members to make their needs known to the department. Not surprisingly, the first question from the audience at the end of this lengthy presentation was for a translation into the local Sepedi language, especially of terms such as 'massification'.¹³ Reactions from project members after the meeting revealed that it had served only to confirm what they saw as the irrelevance of the DoA and its inability, or unwillingness, to understand or respond to their needs. Although the possibility of follow-up visits was mentioned by the official during the meeting, and such visits were requested by the project members, six months later no visit had materialised.

Benefits and livelihood impacts

Members of Dikgolo receive benefits from the various activities on the project, as outlined above, but, as with other projects in this study, such benefits are very limited and make only a minor contribution to the livelihoods of members and their households. Undoubtedly, the most important contribution was benefit in kind from members' own plots. For maize alone, the average replacement value of the harvest was in the order of R910.¹⁴ Other benefits from members' plots included pumpkins, melons and beans (consumed largely within members' households), small amounts of cash income from the sale of surplus crops at local informal markets (not exceeding R200 for the year, in all but one case), access to natural resources (most notably firewood), access to grazing for a minority of members, a free ploughing service and a small quantity of meat from slaughtered cattle (estimated at just two 5 kg portions for the year 2005/06). It would appear that no cash income from cattle sales has been distributed to members since the project began; instead, the money has been used to meet project expenses, including vaccines and sprays for the cattle as well as payment for the herders and the ploughing service.

¹² In 2007, following contact between the researchers and the DoA, an animal health official did visit the farm to assist with calving.

¹³ Based on the presentation at Dikgolo, it would appear that 'massification' refers to plans by the DoA to group all the land reform projects in an area under a single production plan, to be co-ordinated by the department, which would supply machinery and other inputs (possibly in co-operation with private sector operators). The emphasis would be on production of crops for sale. Project members would provide labour (presumably unpaid), but would effectively lose control over the production process (and over their land). However, an undated document obtained from the DoA at Molemole in 2007 ('Business Plan for Massified Projects') refers only to livestock. This plan, with a proposed budget of R7.6 million over five years, would involve the construction of crush pens, dams, fencing, dipping tanks, boreholes, drinking troughs and access roads, as well as the purchase of antibiotics, inoculations and other veterinary treatments. To date, there is no sign of any of these plans being implemented.

¹⁴ Based on an average yield of 455 kg, which converts to approximately 364 kg of maize meal, valued at a retail price of R2.50 per kg

Given the significant amount of time that members contribute to group activities (including meetings) and cultivation of their own plots, these returns appear poor, but members reported that they attached great importance to the friendship and sense of purpose they obtain from the project, and they were hopeful of improving their returns in the future. Overall, 34 out of 39 members reported that their lives had improved since they joined the project and five reported that their lives were neither better nor worse; none reported that they were worse off. In terms of the main problems and challenges facing the project, nearly all members (37) mentioned a lack of infrastructure and equipment on the farm (especially irrigation and a tractor for ploughing), 11 mentioned the lack of extension services, four mentioned unauthorised grazing by non-members from neighbouring communities, and just one mentioned a lack of organisational capacity within the group.

Analysis and recommendations

In many ways, Dikgolo is typical of projects implemented during the first decade of land reform in Limpopo, and suffers many of the problems experienced by such projects, which can be summarised in terms of inappropriate project design and lack of post-settlement support.

The design of the Dikgolo project attempts to marry the needs of a large group of relatively poor people to the land available on the market, within the paradigm of large-scale commercial agriculture. The institutional mechanisms in place for land reform, however, particularly the grants and services provided by various spheres of government, result in a design that is far removed from the needs and aspirations of the intended beneficiaries and seems unlikely to meet the objectives of transformation of the agricultural sector or sustainable improvements in the livelihoods of the beneficiaries. This is evident in numerous areas, including:

- *Choice of land:* low rainfall, poorly developed, with little obvious potential.
- *Size of land:* carrying capacity is too low (estimated at 148 large stock units, LSUs, in the business plan) relative to the size of the group and their livelihood needs.
- *Size of group:* at 65 original members, makes collective decision-making and organisation cumbersome; drop-out of some less-motivated members was perhaps in-

evitable, leading to uncertainty about the status of active and inactive members.

- *Choice of land-holding entity:* the choice of a trust was influenced by officials of the DLA, but this institution is not well understood by the members, inactive and, therefore, fails to perform any meaningful function. Theoretically, a communal property association (CPA) would offer more protection to, and more opportunity for participation by, the members but, as this and other studies show, CPAs do not always live up to their potential in this regard.
- *Inappropriate and obscure planning process:* members were only superficially consulted in the preparation of the business plan and do not feel that it reflects their needs or interests. Proposals for loans from commercial banks were unrealistic, as was the emphasis on production for the market.
- *Insistence on collective forms of production:* Dikgolo farmers were, and remain, interested primarily in individual production of food to meet their household needs. With the exception of the collective cattle herd none of the group activities proposed in the business plan has materialised, and even the cattle herd can be seen as a sideline activity that delivers minimal benefits to members.
- *Lack of support:* from either the DLA or the provincial DoA, in terms of post-settlement grants, training, extension or veterinary services, despite repeated requests for assistance and despite both departments being involved with the project at its inception.

Despite these many limitations, the majority of the members of the Dikgolo Trust have persisted in their efforts to use their land and to secure a livelihood for themselves. Most of their efforts have been around the cultivation of food crops on individual plots, largely for household consumption. This makes a significant contribution to household food needs, especially of the staple maize meal, supplemented by vegetables such as pumpkins, watermelons, beans and groundnuts in season. Sale of surplus produce is no more than a sideline, or bonus, for the farmers, and the cash obtained makes a relatively minor contribution to household income.

Farmers at Dikgolo remain locked into a pattern of low inputs and low outputs from their arable plots, for which one of the most important influences is the relatively low rainfall. White commercial farmers in the area, reportedly, have

moved gradually out of maize production over the past decades, and those that remain make use of centre-pivot irrigation. The groundwater resource on the farm is seemingly sufficient for substantial irrigation, but this would require a capital investment beyond the current means of the members. Without irrigation, yields are likely to remain low, and investment in secondary inputs such as fertiliser and pesticide would only raise the exposure of the farmers at Dikgolo who, given their circumstances, are largely risk averse. While farmers do have access to their own cattle herd, they lack the equipment and skills (and the enthusiasm) required for animal traction, and so remain dependent on hired tractors for ploughing. Farmers were critical of the hired service in terms of cost, quality and reliability, and expressed a strong desire to own a tractor of their own. Given the difficulties the group has experienced in maintaining other equipment such as the bakkie and pump, however, and the very limited returns from dry-land cropping, it is difficult to see how they could afford a tractor, or even pay for its maintenance and operation if one were to be provided for them.

Apart from the land itself, the cattle herd is the main asset shared by the members of the Dikgolo project. This herd has been built up over the past six years, with modest off-take that goes largely to payment for veterinary supplies, fencing, wages for the herders and ploughing the arable plots. Positive aspects of the livestock enterprise are the breed of cattle, Nguni, which appears to be hardy and well suited to the environment, and the small size of the herd, which appears to be well within the capacity of the group to manage. No systematic assessment was made of reproduction rates, but given the slow growth in herd size it would appear to be relatively low. The current herd size is well below the farm's estimated carrying capacity, but it is likely that substantial investment in fencing, water points and combating bush encroachment would be required to reach optimal levels. A comparable number of members' privately owned cattle are also grazed on the land, which is likely to deliver more direct benefits to the minority of members concerned. Overall, the collective cattle enterprise can be seen as an asset that is growing in value, and is effectively self-sustaining, but is delivering relatively little in terms of current benefits to the members. There would appear to be little economic rationale for maintaining a herd of this size, shared by such a large group of peo-

ple, given the very limited benefits available for distribution to members now or in the foreseeable future.

Since obtaining their land, the members of Dikgolo have been left largely to themselves, with minimal support from external agencies. The DLA in the province has long washed its hands of such projects, and clearly sees no role for itself either in organising support services for the beneficiaries or in providing support to the land-holding entity (the Dikgolo Trust) in terms of its land administration responsibilities. Similarly, local government, at both local and district municipality levels, makes no provision for delivering services or support to land reform projects within its area of jurisdiction, and both councillors and officials were at a loss as to what their potential role in this field might be.

Despite having a large staff in both the provincial head office in Polokwane and area offices, and despite receiving numerous requests from the farmers at Dikgolo, the provincial DoA has offered no extension service or support to the project for most of its existence. Interviews with local extension officials produced a multitude of bureaucratic excuses as to why no service had been provided (as well as an insistence that services had been provided on occasions), but also revealed considerable hostility to land reform projects of this type. At a more senior level, provincial officials and politicians tended to write off Dikgolo and other SLAG projects in the area as failures and to focus on elaborate (and perhaps far-fetched) plans for 'restructuring', 'de-registration' and 'massification'. No mention was made in our numerous research meetings and workshops with officials of any plans to ascertain the wishes of project members (the owners and beneficiaries of these projects) or of seeking ways in which land reform and agricultural development could be used to alleviate poverty. Rather, departmental officials appeared to view projects such as Dikgolo as land over which the state had particular rights, and an obligation to ensure it was used productively (according to conventional ideas of commercial agriculture), with the project members being seen as people who could be coerced into working (whether paid or unpaid was unclear) for new, commercial, 'joint ventures', driven by the state and private sector operators.

The most effective support has been provided by the Nkuzi Development Association, but even this has been problematic and has delivered min-

imal benefits to date. The approach of Nkuzi has been quite different from the state agencies, as it began with a consultation with the beneficiaries to ascertain their needs and then moved on to the development of a joint plan for implementation of a range of projects, including a dwelling house and storage, two poultry sheds and a vegetable garden. These relatively low-input initiatives appear to be in line with the needs and abilities of the project members, without exposing them to excessive expense or financial risk. However, this intervention has been marred by long delays caused by slow release of funds by the NGO and disputes with providers of building supplies and equipment. Nonetheless, these initiatives appear to have harnessed the energy and enthusiasm of the members, who have committed considerable amounts of their own labour and display a strong sense of 'ownership'.

The members of the Dikgolo project have shown dedication and perseverance over many years, under difficult conditions, to realise their dream of owning their own land, providing for their families and finding ways out of poverty. The official land reform programme has succeeded in providing them with land but, in virtually every other respect, from choice of land through to post-settlement support, the members of Dikgolo have been failed by a system that seems incapable, even after many years of experience, to take seriously the needs and aspirations of resource-poor people. What keeps them going is a combination of the need for food for their families, a sense of obligation to make use of the resource they have been given and a belief, perhaps naive, that one day the state will intervene and provide them with the means to produce on a more substantial scale.

Reforming the Dikgolo project so that it provides greater benefits to its members presents a considerable challenge. Judging from the adjoining commercial farms and the nearby communal area of Dikgale, the land in the area is suited to either irrigated maize production, which would require substantial capital investment, or extensive grazing of livestock. Even under the present methods of production, there appears to be potential for increasing the cattle herd size, raising off-take and taking full advantage of marketing opportunities in the area, both formal and informal. This too will require considerable investment, particularly in terms of fencing and water points, which conceivably could be funded from more aggressive cattle sales, but most of all it

will require a thorough knowledge of the cattle business and effective farm management, probably beyond what is possessed by the project members. Rather than employing a professional farm manager (whose salary would consume all or most of any additional income) it would be more appropriate if the group could enter into some sort of mentoring arrangement with a state body, a suitable NGO or a private individual (but not at commercial rates) to help them plan the expansion of the livestock enterprise, to raise the necessary finance and to assist them in decision-making. Such a focus on livestock, with appropriate mentoring, would not generate a lot of employment for the group members and, in terms of dividends, would be unlikely to provide more than the equivalent of an extra month's income per year, on average, to each household, but would make good use of the available resource without exposing the group members to excessive risk or expense.

Switching from a collective model of cattle farming to individual herds may also present opportunities, but this was not raised as a possibility by any of our informants at Dikgolo. Those who were grazing their own livestock on the farm were all long-standing owners who had brought cattle with them from the communal areas. None reported having acquired their own cattle as a consequence of acquiring land under the land reform programme, and none mentioned this as a particular need or desire. Dividing up the collective herd among the members would yield precariously small herds (in the order of three to four head each) even at maximum recommend carrying capacity, and would greatly increase the workload on individual owners in terms of herding and other duties. A clear benefit of the collective model, regardless of the other benefits that it might yield, is that it allows for collective herding, which is delegated to two paid workers.

A focus on extensive livestock production would not exclude other, land intensive, activities. The primary need of members, as discussed above, is the production of food crops for own consumption, and ways should be found of promoting this activity. Cultivation of maize under these climatic conditions is a marginal but not negligible activity and still makes a significant contribution to household food needs. A switch to irrigated maize production would require substantial investment in irrigation infrastructure, in operating the pumps and in inputs such as seed, fer-

tiliser and pesticides, which would expose the farmers to a relatively high degree of risk and would probably be beyond their means anyway. Attention should rather focus on ways of adding modest value to the current dry-land activity, through interventions by state, private or NGO agencies, such as:

- a competent extension service to advise farmers on all aspects of maize production;
- an improvement in the quality and reliability of the commercial tractor service (through training of drivers, maintenance of equipment, grants for upgrading, etc.); and
- the selection of appropriate seeds, fertiliser and pesticides, and measures that would improve availability and reduce costs (i.e. bulk purchase and delivery).

Farmers at Dikgolo are unlikely to benefit from selling maize through formal channels, where they are likely to suffer discrimination in terms of both quantity and quality. The benefit of maize is in its direct use within households, and in its substitution for maize meal that would otherwise have to be purchased at retail prices. Producing for the producer prices available (in theory) on formal markets would offer a very different return, and require a substantially different scale of production. Improvement of maize production, therefore, should focus on reducing costs and improving yields, but should not aim to expand overall production beyond what can be consumed within the household or can be disposed of easily on local markets.

Intensive activities such as the vegetable garden and poultry sheds, developed with assistance from Nkuzi, may provide an additional means by which both food products and cash income for the group can be achieved, but both require substantial investment and access to working capital, and both carry considerable risks. Assistance would be required in developing appropriate, low-technology solutions in areas such as irrigation and the heating of poultry sheds. For example, upgrading the wind pump and construction of an in-field reservoir may be more appropriate, and more sustainable, than purchasing an expensive diesel-powered pump (itself a target for thieves, and attracting significant fuel bills) and underground piping. Production of poultry and fresh vegetables at scale also presupposes a reliable, accessible market capable of absorbing additional supply and yielding a reasonable profit. The management skills associated with this type of market-oriented production are not

something that the Dikgolo group have experience of to date, and they will require considerable support and training if they are to manage the process successfully. This sort of intensive production – especially poultry – is also likely to make significant demands on people's time, and lends itself to full-time involvement by a few people rather than part-time contributions by a large group. Ensuring equitable inputs from all, and rewarding people in proportion to their input of labour, are likely to be major challenges, and do not seem to have been considered by either the members or their NGO partner.

The possibility of at least some of the members settling permanently on the farm should also be explored, but would need support from a range of agencies, notably the local municipality, which would be required to provide water and electricity services. Members of Dikgolo say that, given their established social networks, they are unlikely to all relocate from their home villages, but some might do so in the short term and others could follow over time, and they would not necessarily give up their current homes. The practice of staying overnight on the farm, however, even on a rota basis, would reduce the time and money spent on commuting, increase security on the farm and be likely to contribute to the general development of the farm and the community associated with it.

Opportunities undoubtedly exist for greater integration between different aspects of farming at Dikgolo. As noted above, livestock is poorly integrated with crop production in areas such as ploughing, fertilisation and production of fodder (although income from cattle sales does subsidise the cost of tractor ploughing). Individualisation of cattle production might lead to more diverse approaches among members but is unlikely, on its own, to lead to dramatic changes in production.

Full individualisation of the Dikgolo farm – with equal division of land, livestock and other assets between the members – was not raised as a possibility by any of the informants during this study, but does present a theoretical alternative to the present mix of collective and individual activities.¹⁵ Among the obstacles to such a departure would be official opposition to new residential settlements, the lack of infrastructure and services on the farm and the cost involved in construction of homes. It is difficult to see where the impetus, or resources, for such a radical shift might come from.

¹⁵ A possible alternative model of land use at Dikgolo would involve 39 household plots of 1.25 ha each for mixed residential and cropping purposes, plus shared use of communal grazing (equivalent to 14 ha per household), which, at 'recommended' stocking rates, would support approximately 3.8 cattle (or 2.7 cattle and 2.6 goats) per household.

A business plan for Monyamane was prepared in 1997 by the Limpopo provincial DoA and, although efforts have been made to implement only parts of it, it remains the sole planning document for this project and has continued to influence the direction of the project over a ten-year period. Even by the standards of South African land reform planning, the business plan is an extraordinary document that attempts to settle 201 new farmers (and presumably their families) on a farm previously run by a single family and a handful of workers. The financial projections and other assumptions made in the business plan defy commercial logic or common sense, and the document as a whole would appear to have little relevance to the needs of the group on whose behalf it was drawn up. However, it does bear the hallmarks of orthodox farm planning, based on conventional South African models of commercial farming, albeit in a much debased form.

Between 1998 and 2004, activities on the farm centred on the care of a collectively owned cattle herd. Some members tried planting dry-land maize, but this was soon abandoned due to the low rainfall in the area. As neither paid employment nor dividends materialised in the first years, most of the original 201 members dropped out of the project at an early stage, while others (who were not among the original grant recipients) gradually joined the group. Uncertainties about the rights and responsibilities of old and new members continue to affect the project (see below). The original CPA committee collapsed along with the departure of most CPA members. A new committee was formed by the remaining active members, and subsequently the group was managed according to its own (unwritten) rules, without reference to the original CPA constitution. Material benefits of membership include cash from occasional sales of cattle and crops, intermittent benefits in kind (meat and vegetables) and access to a range of wild resources on the land.

The Monyamane CPA and its members

In the course of this research (during 2005/06), 30 active members of the MFA were identified – 17 women and 13 men. All but one lived in the village of Sekgopje, the other one living in the township of Mankweng.¹⁶ The age profile of project members was considerably older than that of the other case studies, with most being

in their fifties or sixties. None of the members was under 40 years of age, and ten were in their seventies; the average age for the group was 63 years. Nearly half the members were women; in the women's focus group they reported having a good relationship with the men they worked with. Men and women undertook similar activities such as planting and harvesting of crops and mending fences, although men did most of the work with the cattle, including herding and spraying. Women reported that they were involved in all decision-making, however, and were generally treated as equals by the men.

The households of members ranged in size from one to ten members, with an average size of 4.9 persons. Three households contained only one adult; five had no adult male, and one had no adult female. Fourteen households contained one person aged 60 years or older, and an additional 12 contained two people aged 60 or older. Seventeen households had children (under 18 years), with the maximum number of children being four.

Average household income, excluding income from the Monyamane project, was R2 822 per month; and, while most (24 out of 30 households) received less than R2 000, five received more than R5 000, the highest being R26 500, a household with no children and six adults (a teacher, a nurse, a civil servant and a mechanic all in employment, as well as two pensioners). Six members reported income from farming outside the project, with an average of R4 217 per annum (equivalent to R351.42 per month), 39.5% of this coming from crops and 60.5% from live-stock.

Of the 30 members currently active, 18 had joined the project during the initial set-up phase (in 1997), while 12 had joined between 2000 and 2003, meaning that 40% of current members are not officially members of the CPA. The years since 2000 would appear to be the time when the original members of the CPA accepted that the original vision (as contained in the business plan) was not going to materialise, the grants from the DLA had all been spent and the original project effectively had collapsed. What exists today can be seen as a reconstituted project group, emerging from the remains of the original CPA and inheriting the land and remaining cattle, but few other assets, and who now run the farm virtually on a subsistence basis, with minimal involvement by official bodies.

None of the members is allocated an individual plot on the farm, but they share in the use of

¹⁶ No effort was made to trace the 183 members who had dropped out of the original CPA, for a number of reasons. First, the current members made clear that they would be uncomfortable with anything (such as a public meeting or interviews) that might reignite the interest of former members who, it was feared, would only be interested in claiming a share of current assets. Second, at the time of research, the Limpopo DoA was involved in the process of 'deregistration', which involved tracing original members and persuading them to formally resign from the project. We felt it was important not to do anything that might associate us with this process (which, reportedly, was viewed with suspicion by former members who feared they might be asked to repay their R15 000 grants). Overall, it was felt that efforts to contact former members were likely to be met with hostility, would be potentially detrimental to existing members and were unlikely to yield useful information.

approximately 10 ha for irrigated cropping, and in the running of a herd of approximately 160 cattle. Most members (25 out of 30) reported that their households had access to some land away from the project (i.e. at their home village), but for 11 of these it was less than one hectare, with an average of 1.95 ha for those who had land. Of the households with land in the village, 21 cultivated their plots in 2005/06, all planted maize and 12 planted additional (rain-fed) crops such as squash and beans.

Seven members had their own cattle, six with between two and five head and one with 15 head.¹⁷ Five members owned goats, six owned chickens and two owned pigs, all in small numbers (i.e. less than ten). None owned sheep or donkeys. Livestock were grazed on communal land at Sekgopje village, where residents were required to pay R5 per cow per annum to the tribal authority, and R5 per small flock of goats. None of these animals had been brought onto the Monyamane land.

The farmers have a formal organisational structure, which they refer to as the MFA. An AGM is held every May, when an executive committee is elected. The executive committee meets once a month and reports its decisions to general meetings of the members. The MFA has no contact with, and receives no support from, the DLA. Mr Mamabola, the secretary of the MFA, reported that the present committee is very united, compared to the original (founding) committee of the CPA, and this has been illustrated by the commitment they and the rest of the active members have shown to the project. Since the election of the new committee, no member has left the project. When someone passes away, he or she is replaced by a family member, which has happened several times since the project began.

Activities on the farm are organised by the MFA committee, with members being deployed in the field according to the needs of the day. Members typically work on the project for three days a week, travelling together from the village either in the bakkie or on the trailer of the project's tractor. Members used to contribute R20 per month towards the operating costs of the project, mainly for fuel, but this is no longer considered necessary, as the income from sales of livestock is now sufficient to meet most expenses.

A potentially destabilising factor is the uncertain status of CPA members who have dropped out of the project and, unlike the situation in the oth-

er case studies, members who have joined the project in recent years. The insecurity of the current group has been exacerbated greatly by the so-called 'deregistration' drive for SLAG projects orchestrated by the provincial DoA. As noted above, the majority of the original membership of the CPA (183 out of 201 members) effectively dropped out of the project at an early stage, and have long stopped coming to meetings or turning up for work on the farm. The explanation for this given by currently active members, and supported by interviews with key informants such as the chief, extension officers and former committee members interviewed in 2006 (and by interviews carried out in 1998 by Nkuzi), were that some members were barely aware that their name had been included in the initial list, and had no intention of becoming involved in a farming project; others dropped out as soon as they realised they would not receive the R15 000 grant personally, or when it became apparent that they would not be given paid employment on the farm, but rather would be expected to work without pay for an indefinite period. Current members said that they were unaware of any procedure by which uninterested members could definitively resign from the project, and none had done so. Officially, the land belongs, collectively, to all the original members of the CPA and they are entitled to equal shares of its produce. Unfortunately, nothing in the CPA constitution or elsewhere makes this entitlement dependent on any input to the actual farming activity. Thus, currently active members are concerned that a large number of lapsed members could turn up at a CPA meeting and, by weight of numbers, take over the running of the association or, worse still, demand a share of the benefits that the currently active members have laboured to produce.

The situation is even more precarious for those who have joined the project since 2000. They are not formal members of the CPA (there is no procedure known to members for adding them to the membership of the association) and, as such, are not co-owners of the land and, strictly speaking, have no entitlement to the produce of the land, regardless of the extent of their own input. Thus, the legal situation of both original and new members is unclear, at best, and potentially insecure. In practice, it would appear that, over time, the wider community of Sekgopje has accepted the new set-up, as no effort has been made by lapsed members to interfere with the operation of the farm and no potential threats

¹⁷ The incidence of cattle ownership appears low given that access to grazing for existing cattle was reportedly among the motivations for applying for the land reform grant in the first place. However, given that only 18 of the 201 original members remain in the project, and that own livestock were expressly banned from the farm by the DLA officials originally involved with the project, it is possible that many cattle owners have dropped out.

were mentioned by the chief or other key informants (although this was not verified through interviews with the lapsed members themselves, for reasons outlined above).

Land description

The land purchased on behalf of the Monyamane CPA consists of three adjoining properties, which were formerly owned and worked as one farm – Weltevreden (1 632 ha in extent), Uitvalgrond (405 ha) and Sakuinskloof (283 ha) – a total area of 2 320 ha, situated approximately 55 km east of Polokwane and 15 km north-east of the University of Limpopo at Turfloop. The area is mountainous, with steep slopes, broken hills and small valleys. Average maximum daily temperatures range from 25–26 degrees Celsius in January to 18–19 degrees in July. The Houtbos River passes through the land and flows during the rainy seasons. Average summer rainfall was reported as 450 mm.¹⁸ The carrying capacity of the land was reported as 5.8 ha per large stock unit (LSU). The previous owner of the farm (Mr Botha) appears to have used most of the land for extensive cattle farming, with just a small area used for production of maize under irrigation.

At the time of purchase, the farm was said to be equipped with 11 earth dams, five reservoirs, five water pumps, six windmills, 15 km of fencing, five dipping tanks and two dwelling houses. The grazing was divided into 43 camps, each with its own drinking trough. According to members of the MFA, much of this infrastructure was in a state of severe disrepair or no longer existed by the time they took over the farm. All the earth dams had dried up and the older reservoirs were no longer in usable condition. One of the two farmhouses had been badly vandalised, but the other had retained its roof, doors and windows.

The Monyamane business plan proposed a model of so-called 'communal farming', whereby the farm would be operated as a single production unit under the day-to-day control of a farm manager and 16 full-time workers. The land would be used for a range of activities, including cattle farming, poultry farming, pig farming, field husbandry and gardening, with further potential for sheep, goat and game farming. A total of 25 ha would be allocated for arable farming, despite the area being highly marginal for maize and for most other crops that can be grown only where irrigation is available. The remainder would be used for grazing. As only 16 members of the CPA would be employed on the farm (assuming the

manager would not be among the members), the vast majority of members would benefit only from dividends, a share of the annual profits of the farm, and have no involvement in its daily operations.

According to the business plan, the total finance required for capital acquisitions (land, livestock and machinery), plus wages for the first year, was R4.7 million. The total capital grant provided by the DLA was just over R3 million (R3 015 000), a shortfall of R1.7 million, which was to be made up by a commercial loan. A 'financial cash flow budget analysis' included in the business plan projected gross income of R1.7 million in the first year of operation, rising steadily to R2.6 million by the tenth year (using fixed prices). The projected net (cumulative) profit over the same period was R2.3 million, while net asset value was expected to grow to R10.1 million.¹⁹ In addition, the business plan included an elaborate 'organisational plan', showing the interaction of various committees, management structures and a special development forum comprising all local stakeholders.

The business plan appears to have been at variance with the expressed wishes of the intended beneficiaries, who stated that they wanted land primarily to graze their existing livestock and to engage in the cultivation of crops, and who complained of not having been involved or consulted in its preparation. As a result, little or no effort was made by the beneficiaries to implement this plan, but it became the key reference point for officials of the DLA and the provincial DoA when it came to releasing additional funds. Apart from the general unfeasibility of employing 17 people prior to any revenue stream being established, and reducing the bulk of the members to passive observers, the lack of working capital was a key obstacle to implementing the plan. No effort was made to access the proposed loan from financial institutions, and it appears unlikely that any institution would have granted a loan to such a large and disparate group without a credit history and a plausible business plan. Lengthy delays were experienced in the release of the remaining funds due from the DLA, but eventually a 4x4 bakkie was purchased, as well as 78 'pedigree' cattle. At the time, the DLA project officer explained that no 'subsistence' cattle (i.e. the cattle already owned by the members) would be allowed onto this farm, which was intended for 'commercial' cattle only (Lahiff 2000).

At the time of research, the remaining members were engaged largely in managing the collective

¹⁸ Background information from the Monyamane Business Plan, prepared by the Limpopo DoA, Land & Environmental Affairs, 1997.

¹⁹ Thus, the implicit promise to the members contained in the business plan was that, over a ten-year period, they would earn a net profit of R2.3 million, gain full-time employment for 16 people, and end up with an asset worth R10.1 million. Even these highly optimistic projections, however, would, however, yield a dividend income of only R1, 144 per member (i.e. per household) per year (or R95 per month) over the ten-year period, based on a membership of 201.

cattle herd and, since 2004, experimenting with a limited amount of irrigated cropping. Members work collectively on the farm three days in every week, without cash remuneration. Two men, who are not considered members of the group, are employed to stay on the farm and look after the livestock. Members of the project do not have individual arable plots on the farm and are not allowed to graze their own livestock there.

Land use

Cattle

When the Monyamane project started in 1998, a herd of 78 cattle was purchased, and by the start of our research, in August 2005, this had grown to 126 head of cattle, with considerable off-take over the intervening period. The project experiences various problems with grazing, as many of the 43 grazing camps are without water points, and fencing is generally in poor condition.

Members reported that they had sold approximately 80 cattle since the project began, and four calves had died from an unknown disease. In July 2005, a further three cattle were killed by thieves on the farm. By January 2006, 13 new calves had been born, one bull had been sold, and a cow had been slaughtered because it was limping, the meat being shared amongst the members. By October 2006, there was a total of 163 head of cattle, including seven newborn calves. By the end of December 2006, further births of calves brought the total herd size to 166, and by May 2007 the herd stood at 173 head.

Livestock are sold to various buyers, including Vleisentralraal, the Zion Christian Church at Moria and members of surrounding communities, who buy at times of funerals and weddings. Part of the income from cattle sales is shared among the members, with the remainder being used to meet project expenses, including the purchase of seed, fertiliser, veterinary products and, above all, fuel for the pump, tractor and bakkie.

Two men are employed to look after the cattle. They are not members of the CPA and are the only paid workers within the project. Mr Malapané (aged 50), who has been employed since 2001, and Mr Mamabola (aged 40), who was employed in 2005 to replace another man, each earn R300 a month. They say they are not satisfied with this amount, as is not enough to meet

all their expenses (particularly on food and burial society contributions). The men stay on the farm for most of the month, providing the only security for the farm and its contents over weekends, and return to their home villages only at month end. Neither is married.

Cattle are clearly central to the Monyamane project. Most labour goes into fencing and other activities associated with cattle, they are the main source of project income for members and are the most valuable asset of the project (apart from the land). Monthly visits to the farm revealed that cattle numbers increased from 147 in June 2006 to 173 in May 2007. The project sold a total of 21 cattle in the year from June 2006 to May 2007, yielding a gross income of R90 000. Only R30 000 of this was paid out to members in cash, with the remainder being absorbed by general project expenses (e.g. fuel and the maintenance of the two vehicles, the purchase of fencing materials and wages for the two herders). On the basis of previous years' experience, however, it is likely that a further payout will be made in the approach to Christmas, funds allowing.

Crop production

In 2005/06, an irrigated area of approximately 10 ha was planted with maize, China spinach (*mcina*), cabbage, beetroot, butternut, beans, onions and groundnuts, over two seasons (summer and winter). Members reported that the yields were disappointing due to a range of problems, primarily with the pump that supplied water for irrigation, but also due to lack of knowledge about pest and disease control and the proper use of fertiliser, as well as the activities of wild animals such as baboons, warthogs and monkeys, which consumed much of the crop. Crops that were harvested were sold informally at pension pay-points and in the village of Sekgopje.

Ploughing was done with the first rains in October, using the tractor owned by the group. The first crops to be planted were butternuts, followed by maize. Unlike the other cases in this study, each crop is allocated its own plot (i.e. there is no intercropping), and seeds are planted in rows, rather than being broadcast. Planting of crops such as beetroot and butternut began in January. By the end of March 2006, all the butternuts had been harvested, the beetroot was still growing, and land was being cleared for other crops such as onions, cabbage and China spinach. Members felt that they could plough

a number of other fields if they could get reliable access to water and money for production inputs.

Monyamane requires a lot of water for livestock and vegetable production. The members rely on just one borehole, which, according to them, is not enough to supply the project. Other old boreholes on the farm were reported to have run dry long ago, and the pumps and pipes had long disappeared. Members repeatedly stated that they needed help in terms of drilling new boreholes, maintaining pumps and building up reservoirs. When the research team first visited the project, Mr Matou (the MFA chairperson) indicated that they were negotiating with officials of the DoA to assist them in providing water. Subsequently, the department constructed a reservoir on the farm, but the farmers have problems filling it due to the poor state of their pump and the low level of underground water on the farm.

Support services

Since the Monyamane project began, the members have received only intermittent support from relevant state agencies. Once the initial grant had been paid out, there was no further contact with the DLA. The provincial DoA, which prepared the business plan and is responsible for the provision of agricultural extension services to farmers in the province, including land reform beneficiaries, has provided occasional veterinary services for the livestock, but even this has not been reliable. In June 2006, the members reported that they had last seen the livestock extension officer in September 2005. They also indicated that they had gone to the provincial DoA to ask for an officer to help them with livestock services and they were told that the province would send someone to help them the following day; they have waited for months and, as a result, have lost a number of cows and unborn calves. Nevertheless, the department did provide funding for the construction of a reservoir.

More effective support has been provided by the University of Limpopo, working with the Agricultural Research Council, as part of its outreach programme, including training the members in cultivation of sweet potatoes and in the de-horning of the cattle. The Centre for Rural Community Development at the university has also been involved in research into livelihoods and land reform at Monyamane, with occasional visits by researchers and students to the farm. Farmers at Monyamane welcome such visits, but

say that it does not assist them with their core needs for infrastructure and working capital. No other NGOs are involved at Monyamane, although members expressed interest in receiving assistance from the Nkuzi Development Association once they heard about its activities.

At a meeting with the area manager and other staff at the Mankweng Agricultural Office in August 2005, our researchers were informed that SLAG beneficiaries were not entitled to apply for funding under the department's Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP), which is intended to provide agricultural support services to previously disadvantaged farmers, including members of land reform projects. Subsequently, officials of the provincial office in Polokwane informed us that this was not the department's official position and accused the regional office of misrepresenting the department, as CASP is intended to include the full range of agricultural activities in the country. In March 2006, the MEC for agriculture in the province met with the Monyamane farmers and informed them that no CASP funding would be provided for them that year, as the date for applications had expired. The repeated complaint of the Monyamane farmers is that officials of the DoA are difficult to contact, are not forthcoming with information on grants and other services that should, in theory, be available to them, and generally show little interest in their project. Our interactions with the department as researchers would broadly confirm this impression.

Although the primary responsibility for the establishment of state-funded land reform projects lies with the DLA and the provincial DoA, local government (at local municipality and district municipality levels) also has a potential role to play in the provision of infrastructure such as water and electricity, and in supporting emerging enterprises under their programmes of local economic development (LED). As part of this research, we explored the role of local government at the level of ward councillor, local municipality and district municipality, and found that they had had little or no knowledge of, or involvement with, the Monyamane project since 1998. Meetings with the integrated development plan (IDP) and LED managers in Polokwane local municipality revealed that the municipality had no involvement in land reform projects, and the officials concerned indicated that they saw land reform as the responsibility of the provincial DoA. The IDP and LED managers of Capri-

corn District Municipality revealed that support for land reform projects had been discussed within the municipality but that due to budgetary constraints nothing had been done to date. However, the district municipality did have plans to introduce at some point in the future a land unit that would handle all matters concerning infrastructural support to land reform projects. The officials also indicated that land reform projects would be included in their future IDPs but, a year later, this had not transpired. During our discussions, officials of both the local and the district municipalities cited a general lack of communication from the DLA, the provincial DoA, the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC) and NGOs in the province as the main reason for their lack of knowledge about land reform within their areas of jurisdiction.

Members of the Monyamane project live in one electoral ward but hold their land in another. We met with Mr Masenya, the ward councillor for the area of Sekgopje village, who said that he was interested in the project but could do little to help as the land lay in the ward of another councillor (with whom the project members have no contact). Mr Masenya reported that to date the Polokwane local municipality has done nothing to assist the Monyamane project and he undertook to raise the matter at the next meeting. He confirmed that project members had applied for the supply of water and electricity from the municipality and that this has not been addressed as the municipality believed it was the responsibility of the provincial DoA and the national DLA.

In August 2005, researchers met with Chief Mamabola and the traditional council at Sekgopje village. These traditional leaders said that they fully supported the efforts of their people to acquire land and improve their livelihoods, but were not in a position to provide material assistance. The chief also asked for advice on acquiring title deeds for the communal land currently occupied by the community.

Benefits and livelihood impacts

Members obtain modest benefits from their farm, in both cash and kind. Members reported obtaining a bag of green vegetables three times in the previous year, and a portion of meat (approximately 10 kg) twice in the year. In addition, members received a share of cash from the sale of vegetables, cattle, firewood and thatching

grass: over the year, this was reported as being in two payments, the first of R200 and the second of R1 000 per member (i.e. a total of R1 200 per member over the course of 2005/06). Early in 2007 (when there were no crops to sell), members received R1 100 each, purely from cattle sales. Other benefits accruing to members were firewood (for which some members said they must pay R200 per bakkie load, but others said they obtained free of charge), thatch grass, wild food plants and medicinal plants, which they were free to collect on the farm for their personal use. Of these, the most significant value was in firewood, with members reporting that they could gather sufficient to meet their entire needs for the year. Members also reported that the project donates a bakkie-load of firewood when there is a funeral in the household of any of the members. In July 2006, one of the members passed away and the group decided to donate a cow and a load of firewood to the family for the funeral. Members stressed that this was not the usual practice, but the cattle herd had reached a considerable size and they wished to assist the family and make sure that their comrade got a decent funeral.

Unlike the other cases, members at Monyamane obtain relatively equal benefits from their project. This is because all production is pooled and benefits are shared through a formal process. Observations on the farm suggest that wild resources – thatch grass, firewood, building poles, wild foods and medicinal plants – are shared on a relatively egalitarian basis, although not everyone utilises all of the different resources. The imposition of limits on over-harvesting are evident through the levying of charges for firewood and thatching grass beyond a certain quantity (which also serves as a means of wealth redistribution, as the income is eventually shared amongst the members) and by limitations on physical access (the farm is difficult to reach in anything but a tractor or a 4x4 vehicle, and farm gates are kept locked, making it virtually impossible for members to extract resources without other members knowing about it). The provision of firewood and even cattle for slaughter at funeral times also serves as a form of income equalisation, as well as cementing social solidarity.

The available data suggest that total income from the Monyamane project (in cash and kind) distributed to members is in the order of R2 050 per annum (or R171 per month), which constitutes a modest supplement to household cash

income from other sources, estimated at R2 822 per month on average.²⁰ The calculation of annual income is shown in Table 8.

The main problem confronting members of this project was a lack of infrastructure, particularly functioning boreholes and pumps that would supply water both for livestock and for irrigated cropping, and secure fencing for the cattle camps. The next most common problems reported were security on the farm, which has been plagued by theft, vandalism and poaching, and tenure insecurity, particularly among those who were not part of the original CPA. The frequency with which these and other problems were mentioned by members (with multiple answers from some respondents) is shown in Table 9.

The majority of members (20) said that they felt they were better off since joining the Monyamane project, nine said that they were no better off, and one said she was worse off. In addition to the modest material benefits listed above, members stressed the positive social relations and solidarity they had with each other, often better than they had with their neighbours in the village. A women’s focus group reported that the project leaders encourage them to work peacefully and relate well to each other for the good of the project and for their own individual good, and that this has worked well and that they enjoy the new friendships they have made since joining the project. In 2006, some of the members joined an adult literacy scheme (ABET)

run by the provincial Department of Education, which they saw as an extension of their involvement in the land reform project.

Analysis and recommendations

The Monyamane project illustrates many of the problems and challenges confronting redistributive land reform, but also the desire among sections of the rural population to be farmers and their resilience under difficult conditions. From the outset, the choice of land and the size of the beneficiary group have worked against the project. The land is dry, unsuited for rain-fed crops, poorly developed and difficult to access. The large size of the initial beneficiary group was determined purely by the grant conditions imposed by the DLA. It appears to have included many poorly motivated people and was detrimental to effective farming and collective action. These problematic beginnings were greatly compounded by the imposition of an irrelevant and inappropriate business plan and the failure of state agencies – at all levels of government – to provide necessary support to the project. Given the poor design of the project, and its failure to generate any of the anticipated benefits in terms of employment or cash income in the early years, it is not surprising that most members walked away from it.

What is perhaps more surprising is that a small minority persevered with the enterprise and, joined by a number of new recruits, have managed to use the land at a relatively low level of productivity and to generate a modest revenue stream for themselves. Given the amount of effort required from the members, however, this income represents a poor return on their labour and, as shown above, makes a relatively minor contribution to household welfare.

The future of the Monyamane project remains uncertain. Members are not in a position to make the scale of investment necessary to significantly raise productivity in terms of either livestock or,

Table 8: Income (in cash and kind) distributed to Monyamane project members, 2005/06

Type of benefit	Cash value (R)
Firewood	200
Vegetables	150
Natural resources	100
Cash	1 200
Meat	400
Total	2 050

Table 9: Main problems experienced by members at Monyamane

Problem	Number of responses
Lack of infrastructure	25
Theft, poaching and trespassing	11
Insecure land rights	8
Lack of skills/capacity within the group	6
Damage to crops caused by wild animals	3

²⁰ As in the other case studies, maize harvested by farmers in the Monyamane group was calculated as a proportion of estimated household needs. In this case, however, all maize production was on individual holdings, which were held by people prior to joining the group. The majority of members (23 out of 30, or 77%) reported producing less than 50% of their household maize needs; six (20%) produced between 50% and 100%; and just one (3%) produced more than 100%. On average, households produced 29% of annual household maize needs, all on private plots separate from the project farm, by far the lowest of the four cases.

even less likely, crop production. The age and skills profile of the membership also suggests that they are unlikely to move much beyond their current level of activity, even if the necessary training and support services were available to them. The status of current members (not all of whom are members of the original CPA) is also uncertain, and members have been made to feel even more insecure in the light of statements by public figures, such as the MEC for agriculture, about the restructuring of SLAG projects and 'deregistration' of inactive members.

In terms of support from the state, agencies at every level of government have effectively denied responsibility for Monyamane and similar projects in the area. The DLA has had no involvement with the project beyond the provision of the initial grant for land purchase. The provincial DoA is clearly unsure what, if any, its role may be, and field-based officials effectively refuse to render services to such projects. Local and district municipalities, despite having clear responsibility for the provision of basic services and for LED, continue to insist that land reform lies outside their area of competence and, as a result, offer no support whatsoever to land reform projects. Recent initiatives by the DoA to 'revive' SLAG projects through 'deregistration' of inactive members, the introduction 'strategic partners' from the private sector and the 'massification' of production do not auger well, given the department's record in this area to date and its continued inability to engage with project members around their needs.

Reform of the Monyamane project could take a number of directions, of which the most important is probably the further development of the cattle herd. Members estimate that the available land could support roughly double the current number of cattle, if fencing and, above all, the supply of water could be improved in all the grazing camps. As with the case of Dikgolo, the key factor in growing the herd and improving the flow of income to members is effective management, based on a thorough understanding of all aspects of cattle farming and the local market. As with Dikgolo, the size of the farm does not warrant a full-time farm manager, whose salary would consume all or most of the potential profits. Again, what is required is some sort of mentoring arrangement, which would involve a gradual transfer of skills and knowledge to the members and support in making key decisions.

Capital would also be required, both for infrastructural development and to meet operating

expenses, but much of this could be self-funded over time if the herd was well managed. Establishment of a regular income stream, with proper financial accounts, could also provide a basis for modest borrowing from a sympathetic lender. Another critical factor would be accessing funding from sources such as the DoA's CASP and MAFISA (micro-finance) programmes, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, the National Development Agency and NGOs operating in the area. Projects like Monyamane and Dikgolo have had very little success in attracting such funding to date and would benefit from professional advice from a mentor or other support agency.

As with Dikgolo, the capital costs (and risks) associated with irrigated cropping on a commercial scale are probably prohibitive for a group such as Monyamane, especially with farm infrastructure in such a poor state of repair and an uncertain supply of groundwater. Given the very limited capacity of members to produce their own food at present, however, attention should be given to small-scale production of vegetables under a rudimentary (and cheap) form of irrigation. Repair or replacement of the existing wind pumps and reservoirs, and use of flexible over-ground piping may provide the most appropriate solution, but technical advice on irrigation, and basic agricultural extension support, would also be required by the members. The Monyamane group is already in possession of a tractor, which could be put to good use in small-scale cropping for the members. Past experience at Monyamane suggests that multiple problems ensued when the group attempted to produce crops at scale – considerable costs (including members' own labour) were incurred and difficulties were encountered in marketing of the produce. Production aimed primarily at meeting household food needs would allow costs to be controlled and would eliminate the need for marketing, while allowing members to develop their capacity should they wish to expand into production for the market, either on an individual basis or collectively. Production of rain-fed maize should be avoided, given the low rainfall in the area and the threat posed by wildlife such as bush pigs and baboons.

Additional ventures could be an option for Monyamane, given the number of farm buildings presently on the land; pig farming has been suggested by the members. This would involve considerable costs, however, particularly in terms of feed, and there are currently no by-products

available on the farm that could be used. It would also divert attention from cattle farming, and would require additional skills, so should only be considered once the cattle enterprise is well established.

As with the other cases, establishing a permanent human presence on the farm should be a priority, both for security reasons and to facilitate greater investment of people's time and energy in the development of the property. Members of Monyamane CPA have been told by officials of the DoA that they are forbidden to settle on the farm, and no support is likely to be provided by the local municipality in the development of housing or infrastructure. A major shift will be required in official thinking if members of land reform projects such as Monyamane are to be encouraged to resettle on their land. Establishing a residential settlement on the land could also lead to greater individual initiative

by members, and even the individualisation of some forms of agricultural production, but this possibility was not raised by farmers at Monyamane during the course of the research.

Finally, support will be needed to build the capacity of the CPA in terms of both its land administration functions and its oversight of agricultural activities on the farm. In terms of the Communal Property Association Act 28 of 1996, this is a role that should be played by the DLA, but which it has not performed to date. A new approach will be required from the DLA and DoA to ascertain the needs of the active members at Monyamane and to work with them to develop their potential. There is also a possible role for an NGO with appropriate capacity-building skills to work with the CPA, but this would need to be supported, financially and otherwise, by the relevant state agencies.

Chapter 5: Mahlahluvani case study

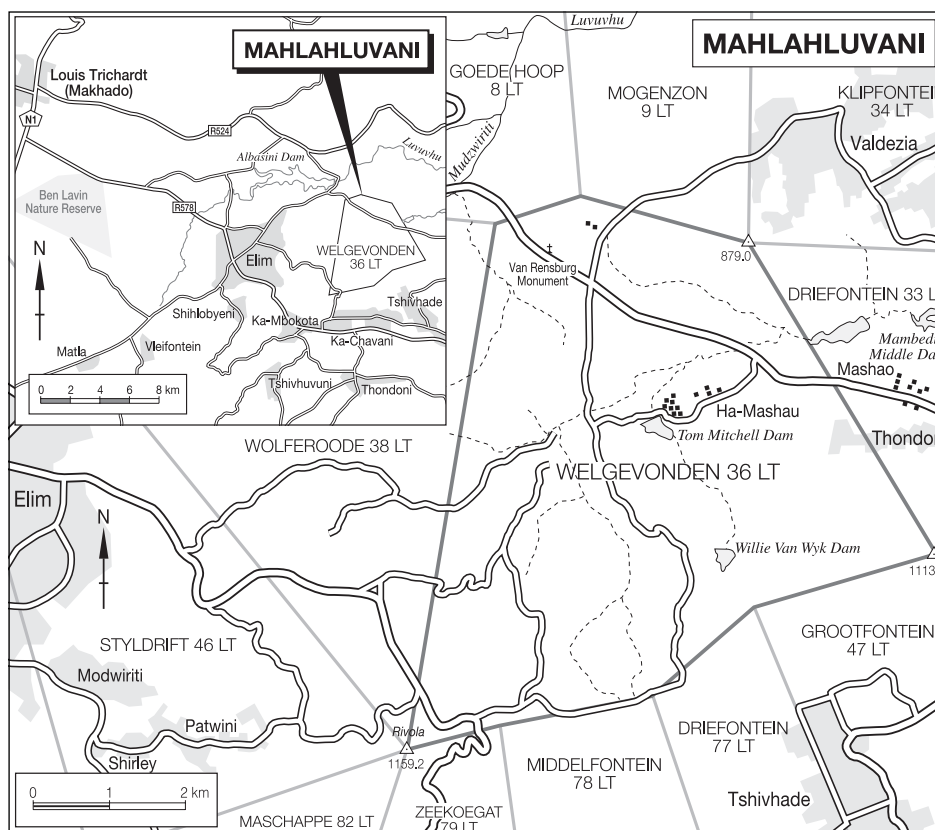
Background

Mahlahluvani is the name adopted by a group of people claiming restitution of the farm Welgevonden 36 LT, located on the slopes of Ribolla Mountain, approximately eight kilometres north-east of Elim Hospital (see Map 5). Since 1996, members of this group have been occupying this land informally and cultivating crops, awaiting the formal settlement of their restitution claim. The original Mahlahluvani was a headman of the Shangaan-speaking Manganyi Magoda clan, who lived in the nineteenth century under the rule of chief Njhakanjhaka of Mukhari Xilumani. Today, the Mahlahluvani community is made up mostly of Shangaan speakers, with a minority of Venda speakers. Most live in the villages of Nw'axinyamani and Chavani, and the community has close ties with surrounding communities such as Mashau and Dhavhani. Members of Mahlahluvani do not refer to themselves in terms of a tribal identity, but rather as the descendents of a (ethnically mixed) community that once occupied Welgevonden farm.²¹

According to interviews with community members, and testimony in the files of the Nkuzi Development Association and the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC) for Limpopo, the first white person to occupy the land of the Mahlahluvani was a Swiss missionary called Padu Liengme, around 1928. The missionaries built a school, with a Mr Tlhabela as principal. Over time, the land was divided into various portions that were allocated to white owners, among them Richard Liengme, D.T. Thomas (known as Dombani), Jardin Liengme, Phillip Pierre Liengme and J.A. Botha, who was also the native commissioner for the district of Louis Trichardt.

At first, the African occupants were allowed to farm the land much as they had in the past; by the 1940s, however, the new white owners demanded that they serve as labour tenants – meaning that they were obliged to work without pay for the white owners – and started to impose restrictions on the number of people who could live on the farm and on the numbers and types of livestock they could keep. By 1952,

Map 5: Mahlahluvani



²¹ Discussions with the community about their land claim tended to focus on the period from the 1920s to the 1970s, when an African community lived on the farm in the shadow of white owners, and which is within living memory. Little or no reference was made to the period prior to the coming of white settlers. Therefore, the Mahlahluvani restitution claim can be seen as attempting to restore a twentieth-century 'farm community' (which was ethnically and linguistically mixed, and relatively egalitarian) rather than a pre-colonial tribal order.

Extract from the affidavit of Mkhathshani Jackson Shiluvane, born 7 January 1912 (dated 16 August 2004)

When these white families arrived things changed to bad. They took away our land and we were relegated to a status of being labourers. We were compelled to work on their fields for free in exchange for tenancy. Our fields were taken without compensation and community members like Tromp Booï who had big fields lost hundreds of mango and orange trees...When working for these white farmers we encountered harsh treatment from both Mmberengeni [a white man] and Van der Merwe, who was commonly known as Khangelala...Most families could not withstand the harsh treatment meted out and in defiance they relocated to the south...We remained behind, still offering our labour for free, solely for tenancy...In 1978, we were finally evicted from Mbooyi's land by Sapekoe Tea Plantation and we moved to Hoogmoed where we are currently living. Our rights to bury our deceased or access our graves on Mbooyi's land were curtailed.

Extract from the affidavit of Alice Nkhensani Mashila, born at Mahlahluvani, 8 October 1942 (dated 8 August 2004)

When I was about 14 years of age, I used to work in Mr Liengme's house where my sister Marie Mukwevho was also working as a domestic worker. I was not earning a salary or wage as there was a government obligation that every person must work for three months in return for permission to reside on the land. During our stay on the farm, Mr Liengme and other neighbouring farm owners started a school named Damboni School. This happened in 1965. During 1965 there was also an instruction given by the Commissioner that families with sons or daughters who were working outside the farm must vacate the farm as they were not offering their labour as required by law. People were forced to leave the farm in different years until 1988 when the last group left. My family left in 1988. My parents had cattle which the children were responsible for. There were also ploughing fields, streams which had water for the whole year and fields for grazing cattle. When we were working the three-months system we were also forced to plant trees on the fields where the community's livestock used to graze and where our parents ploughed their crops.²²

people were required to work for three months of the year without pay. Numerous evictions occurred between 1963 and 1979, as the government of the day attempted first to enforce, and later to eliminate, the system of labour tenancy in the area. After the forced removals, people of Mahlahluvani moved to various places such as Malamulele, Bungeni, Nw'axinyamani, Chavani and Mbhokota.

The Mahlahluvani community restitution claim, submitted on 18 May 1997, is based on gradual dispossession of land rights beginning in 1928 and culminating in the subsequent eviction of community members. The experience of dispossession was described in affidavits submitted to the RLCC as part of the Mahlahluvani land claim (see box).

Gezane Wilson Manganye reported how his family were ordered to leave Welgevonden in 1959, having worked on the three-month system and having been involved in planting bluegum trees

on the land. Hlengani Samson Mabasa testified how in 1965 he was ordered by the then owner, Mr P.P. Liengme, to sell his cattle, as they were too many and he was working in Johannesburg and not staying full-time on the farm. When he refused, he and his family were given a *trekpass* by the farmer, endorsed by the native commission of Louis Trichardt, Mr Botha.

In 1954, the farm Welgevonden, along with other farms in the area, was excised from the 'released area' (a 'black area', in terms of the Development Trust and Land Act 18 of 1936), under Proclamation 156 of 1954, and was declared a 'white area'. A total of 38 other farms, 35 350 morgen in extent, were purchased by the South African Native Trust as substitution land. The *Government Gazette* of 14 March 1958 subsequently proclaimed 'Bantu Tribal Authorities' for the Mulenzhe Tribal Authority (also known as Piet Booï), the Shirindi Tribal Authority and others for people removed from Welgevonden and surrounding farms.

²² Copies of affidavits in the files of the Nkuzi Development Association, Elim.

Having been declared a white area, and cleared of most of its original African population, much of Welgevonden was acquired subsequently (between 1978 and 1982) by the South African Development Trust (SADT) for incorporation into the Venda homeland. The land acquired by the SADT, seven portions in all, was used by Safcol for forestry, by the Venda parastatal, Agriven for an agricultural project and for the expansion of Mashau village.²³ Part of the land was occupied (seemingly unofficially) by the Venda-speaking Davhana community in the late 1980s. The Sapekoe company acquired ownership of three portions, on which it established tea and coffee estates, while the largest portion (the remaining extent) passed through the hands of various (white) private owners.

The Mahlahluvani land claim

During 1995, hearing that the new democratic government was encouraging people to reclaim their land, a number of people who had been forcibly removed from Welgevonden returned to occupy part of their ancestral land, where they cleared the bush, erected temporary shelters and started ploughing. Unknown to them, two formal land claims were lodged for this farm around the same time – by the Davhana community in June 1995, and by the Mashau community in December 1996. The occupation by the Mahlahluvani people was opposed by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), which accused them of trespassing on forestry land and threatened to report them to the police. The occupation was brought to the attention of the RLCC, seemingly on behalf of Davhana or Mashau claimants. Between August and October 1997, the Mahlahluvani community had a succession of meetings with DWAF, the provincial MEC for agriculture and various officials in an attempt to identify the official boundaries of the forestry land and to find a means of coexistence between the farmers and the forestry plantation.²⁴ Once state officials started describing the Mahlahluvani occupation of Welgevonden as illegal, the extension services that had occasionally been provided by the provincial DoA were withdrawn.²⁵

Faced with threats of eviction and prosecution, the Mahlahluvani community approached the Nkuzi Development Association for assistance. A community meeting, called in May 1997, was attended by 51 people and an interim committee was formed, consisting of Gezane Wilson Man-

ganye as chairperson, Hlengani Samson Mabasa as deputy chairperson, Phineas Phosa as treasurer and Mr Masia as secretary. Generally, the committee members were people of relatively high socio-economic status within the community (including local business people) and were not directly involved in the land occupation. On 2 September 1997, a formal restitution claim was lodged for the farm Welgovonden. In December 1998, a further claim was lodged for the same land, in the name of the Mmboi community, bringing the total number of claims on the land to four.

Our discussions with all four claimant groups revealed that effectively they were claiming different portions of Welgevonden, with only slight overlap between the claims. The claims of the Mashau and Mmboi communities would appear to be driven, at least in part, by issues of tribal jurisdiction, both chiefs claiming that the land forms part of their historical territory, regardless of who occupied it at any particular time.²⁶ Officially, Welgevonden is divided into 11 portions but, because none of the claimant groups specified any particular portions on their claim forms, the appearance was created that all four were claiming the same land (i.e. the entire farm). The Mahlahluvani occupation, for example, is confined to portions of state land, currently controlled by Safcol, and the community has expressed no interest in the part of Welgevonden known as La Rochelle or the land occupied by Mashau village, despite the fact that the Mahlahluvani claim, like the three other claims, is apparently for the whole of Welgevonden. This may have occurred because the claimants were unaware of how the farm was divided and which portions corresponded to their ancestral lands, but it is remarkable that neither the RLCC nor any of the claimant groups appears to have gone to the effort of clarifying the portions under claim by the respective groups. This omission and its consequences are discussed in more detail below.

This research and report focus on the claim of the Mahlahluvani group, and on the land currently occupied by them, for two reasons. Unlike the other groups, the members of the Mahlahluvani community are engaged in small-scale agriculture on a substantial scale on land they have occupied since 1995, which makes them directly relevant to this study. Secondly, Mahlahluvani is the only one of the four groups that aspires to being inclusive – that is, it claims to be willing

²³ After 1994, Agriven, along with other ex-homeland parastatals, was incorporated into the Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation, wholly owned by the Limpopo government.

²⁴ Mr Nemukula of DWAF denied that the department had tried to prevent people from using the land for agricultural activities, but had insisted that farmers first apply for the necessary licence from the DWAF offices at Makhado. He informed them that if they ploughed without having the licence they would be liable to prosecution under the Forestry Act 122 of 1984. He further indicated that when the RLCC advises the department that the land is ready to be transferred to the claimants, DWAF will hand over the land to the rightful owners and would be willing to work with them if they opted to continue with the forestry industry.

²⁵ Mrs Mzimba, an extension officer with the DoA, indicated that before the land claim at Ribolla, she used to provide extension services to the Dhavhana and Mahlahluvani communities who were ploughing on the area; however, after it became known that people were not allowed to plough the land, as the claim had not yet been finalised, the department withdrew its services.

²⁶ Restitution claims in Limpopo have been influenced heavily by such claims for restoration of tribal jurisdiction, and boundary disputes between chiefs continue to be a sensitive political issue in the province. Restitution policy focuses on people who enjoyed real rights in land – i.e. rights of use and occupation – rather than those who exercised political jurisdiction.

to include all genuine victims of dispossession from Welgevonden within its ranks, regardless of which community they now belong to. Other claimants appear to be more interested in asserting the primacy of their particular claim and excluding others.

In July 2004, following mediation by the RLCC and the Nkuzi Development Association, the four claims on Welgevonden were merged into one, which was called the Welgevonden 36 LT Community Land Claim, and a joint steering-committee was set up with representatives of all four communities, but tensions between the four groupings have continued.

The claimants are adamant that they want restoration of all their ancestral land, rather than cash compensation or alternative land. On the side of the current landowners and users, Safcol has indicated that it is willing to see the state forestry land restored to the claimants, as long as it could continue with commercial exploitation of the forestry. The Agriculture and Rural Development Corporation (ARDC, a parastatal body under the control of the Limpopo provincial government), which also occupies state land, has indicated that it too supports restoration. However, Sapekoe Estate (Pty) Ltd, the private-sector owner of Portion 4 (404 ha) has indicated that it is unwilling to sell. In a lawyer's letter of 15 March 2005 to the RLCC, Sapekoe contested the validity of the claim, arguing that the Welgevonden community did not exist as a community at the time of alleged dispossession, that people left the land voluntarily, and so no forced removals were involved, that compensatory land was provided, and that any individuals remaining on the land after 1958 'had at most the rights of labour tenants who do not qualify to institute a claim for restitution' – a statement clearly at odds with recent judicial interpretations of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994.

The consolidated claim was officially gazetted on 23 September 2004.²⁷ This was quickly followed by a notice to the general public from the RLCC, citing section 11(7) of the Act, prohibiting persons from obstructing the passage of the claim, subdividing or developing the land without written permission from the RLCC, or a claimant entering the land without the consent of the owner.²⁸

In November 2005, the RLCC made an application to the Land Claims Court for an interim interdict to prohibit the four claimant communities, as well as the Makhado municipality, the

ARDC, Fruitland Estate and Sapekoe Estate from allocating, donating, subdividing, rezoning or developing the land without permission from the RLCC. From the founding affidavit submitted to the court by the RLCC (dated 10 November 2005), it is clear that the action was directed mainly against the Mashau community, which has erected permanent housing on the land, which has been electrified by the Makhado municipality, as well as establishing orchards.²⁹

Since then, the RLCC has entered into an agreement with the occupiers, which allows them to continue farming as long as they plant only seasonal crops and do not build permanent structures or plant orchards. At the time of writing, the case was still pending in the Land Claims Court.

The Mahlahluvani Farmers' Group

Unlike the other case studies presented here, Mahlahluvani does not correspond to the standard model of an official land reform 'project', and could be described better as a self-organised land access movement, based on the reclaiming of historical land. There is a strong sense of solidarity among the members, fostered by factors such as family ties, a common history of dispossession, the arduous effort of clearing their plots and walking a long distance to them every day, and by the threat of eviction that they face. Productive activities, however, are almost entirely on an individual (or household) basis. Every farmer has his or her own plot and there is no common property or group activity, although occasionally neighbours assist on each other's plots in informal, reciprocal relationships.

The farmers meet as a group in the fields when necessary to discuss common problems, such as visits from government officials or theft from their plots. There are no formal leaders, or office holders, but informal leadership is provided by a group of older men, who were the first to occupy the land, the most prominent of whom is Morgan Sithole, known locally as Xikhalamazulu. This informal leadership is distinct from the land claim committee, which is made up of better-off and better-educated members of the community who are not actively involved in the land occupation and are awaiting the formal settlement of the restitution claim.

Our survey identified a total of 42 members of the Mahlahluvani community with arable plots

²⁷ 'General Notice in Terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994), as Amended', in Government Gazette No. 26799, 23 September 2004. Also 'Acceptance Report', dated 14 September 2004.

²⁸ This was followed by a 'Final Warning' from the RLCC to all parties (dated 26 October 2005), warning them to desist from invasion and development. On 24 November 2004, a meeting with 'cultivators' was held at La Rochelle. 'The officials of the Commission (Mr Shilote and Mudau, T.P.) travelled through the farm on the 26th October 2004 distributing information letters and warning people that they would face the mighty hand of the law if they would insist in carrying out those illegal activities like demarcating orchards and planting trees on the property.'

²⁹ Section 4.6 of the affidavit reads: 'The unauthorised occupation and settlement is in the form of involved allocation of residential sites on the farm, construction of residential buildings which results in destruction of the forestry in the area as well as electrification of the area by the Sixth Respondent' (Makhado Municipality). This and other statements clearly point to the Mashau Community. Section 6 continues in similar vein: "There are people who have been allocated sites and are residing on the farm. The continued illegal occupation of the farm by the said land invaders obstructs the process of the consideration of the claim. These unauthorised occupants have to be evicted. It is the responsibility of the Sixth Respondent to arrange alternative accommodation for the said persons.'

on the farm – 22 men and 20 women. The farmers live mostly in the surrounding villages of N’wazinyamani (20 farmers), Bode (9), Chavani (8) and Mashau (2), with one each coming from Giyani, Mavina and Bungeni. The early pioneers cleared the first plots in 1995 and new members were still joining the group in 2005 when the research began.

The household questionnaire revealed that households at Mahlahluvani ranged in size from one to ten members. Most (31 out of 42) had between four and seven members, and the average household size was 5.4 persons. A surprisingly high number (16) reported no children (aged 0–17 years) living within their households, the average number of children per household being 1.9. Households contained between one and eight adults, with the average number being 3.9. All households had at least one adult female and all but four contained an adult male. The majority of households (28) contained at least one person aged 60 years or older.

None of the farmers (i.e. the actual plot-holders) had off-farm employment, but many had household members in formal or informal employment, or in receipt of pensions. Average off-farm cash income, including wages, welfare receipts and remittances, was found to be R1 809 per household per month (or R355 per

head). Near half of all households (19 out of 42) reported off-farm income of less than R1 000 per month, while just seven reported earning R2 000 or more. The highest monthly income reported was R10 960, which household included a teacher and two pensioners.

Land description

The farm Welgevonden 36 LT is 3 048.6 ha in extent and is divided into 11 portions (see Table 10). Seven portions are registered in the name of the SADT, making them state-owned land, one (the remaining extent) is registered in the name of Fruitlands Estates (Pty) Ltd, and three in the name of Sapekoe Estates (Pty) Ltd. The Mahlahluvani land occupation is restricted to the portions owned by the state and allocated largely to Safcol for forestry purposes, although much of the land is not planted with trees.

The area occupied by the Mahlahluvani community is mountainous but with fertile soils and a relatively high rainfall suitable for rain-fed maize and subtropical crops such as bananas, sweet potatoes, chillies and avocados. Officials of the DoA reported that average rainfall for the period October to February was in excess of 700 mm. On the western side of the land are the graves of people who lived there before the white settlers came, and the ruins of the shop

Table 10: Formal ownership of Welgevonden portions *

Portion	Owner	Extent (ha)	Title date	Bond holder/Comments
Remaining extent	Fruitlands	846.88	1997 ²	Previously registered by Maria v.d. Merwe in 1952, and bought by J.F. Conroy in 1984 for R450 000
Portion 1	Sapekoe	375.88	1978	Held by ARDC
Remaining extent of Portion 2	Sapekoe	119.69	1979	
Remaining extent of Portion 3	SADT	225.15	1980 (Venda)	Randgold & Exploration Co Ltd (from 1997)
Portion 4	Sapekoe	404.02	1978	Held by ARDC
Portion 6 **	SADT	187.49	1980 (Venda)	
Remaining extent of Portion 7	SADT	103.00	1980 (Venda)	
Portion 8	SADT	103.00	1980 (Venda)	
Portion 9	SADT	103.00	1980 (Venda)	
Portion 10	SADT	152.80	1980 (Venda)	
Portion 11	SADT	27.69	1982 (Venda)	

*Note: Information obtained from copies of deeds information in files of the Nkuzi Development Association and RLCC Notice 2089 of 2004.

** Note: No portion 5 is listed in these sources.

and schoolhouse that operated from the 1930s until the 1970s. There is also an earth dam on the south-eastern side of the occupied land. The land is surrounded by blue gum plantations, which are leased to Safcol by DWAF.

Land use

Farmers at Mahlahluvani are relatively poor and engage in farming primarily in order to produce staple foods for their households (see below). Plots vary considerably in size, determined by the topography and the ability of people to clear the bush and cultivate the land, virtually all of which is done by hand. Most crops are rain-fed – maize, pumpkins, groundnuts and sweet potatoes. There are also some fruit trees such as papaw, mango, avocado and guava. Small areas of winter crops such as spinach, cabbage and beetroot are irrigated by hand from the small streams that flow through the land. None of the farmers in the Mahlahluvani community had livestock on the land, but people from surrounding villages occasionally graze their livestock in the area, which leads to some damage to crops and conflict with the plot-holders.

Agricultural production

The precise size of plots was unknown to the occupants and was difficult to estimate due to their irregular shapes. Researchers measured the plots and found that they ranged in size from approximately 0.5 ha to approximately 10 ha, with most being in the range of one to two hectares. The majority of farmers (33 out of 42, or 79%) had no arable land available to them prior to joining the occupation. Of the others, six reported that they had less than one hectare at their home village, while a further three had one, three and six hectares, respectively, but all described this as inferior in quality compared to the land at Mahlahluvani.³⁰ The majority of farmers (33 out of 42) reported that they now had sufficient land to meet their needs; nine said they would like to have more land, but also said that they were not in a position to work it, given their currently available resources.

Three farmers reported keeping cattle (ranging from 6 to 9 head), five kept goats (2–10 head) and six kept chickens (2–17), all of which were kept in their home villages. In terms of off-take, just one farmer reported slaughtering a single head of cattle during the year 2005/06, and none sold any. One farmer consumed four goats and sold another four. Four farmers reported con-

suming their own chickens (4–8), and none sold any. None of the group brought their livestock to the land, as it is far from their homes and is not considered secure.

All but one of the farmers cultivated their land by hand, using hoes. Among the reasons given for this was the difficulty of accessing their fields by tractor, but the main reason cited by virtually all respondents was the lack of cash to hire a tractor. Just one member of the group had hired a tractor in the past year, and he cultivated much more land than any other member (10 ha, compared to an average of 2.9 ha for the rest of the group).

Crop production at Mahlahluvani centres on maize and a range of vegetables, including a variety of melons and pumpkins, groundnuts, beans and sweet potatoes. All of these are grown without irrigation and are well suited to the warm and relatively wet conditions found on Welgevonden. A minority of farmers whose plots are located adjacent to streams grow a variety of fruit trees, including banana, mango, avocado and papaw, sugar cane and vegetables such as spinach, cabbage and beetroot. Vegetables are grown on a relatively small scale during the dry winter season when they are irrigated by hand using watering cans.

Farmers at Mahlahluvani start clearing their land in August and start ploughing as soon as the first rains come, between late September and early November. Maize is their main crop, around which all other activities are organised. In all cases, maize seed is broadcast by hand, and pumpkins and beans are planted among the maize plants once they have germinated. By December or January, the farmers start weeding their plots.

Farmers typically spend four or five days a week on the land during the busiest time of the year, and most labour is provided by the principal plot-holders. Diaries kept by 14 of the respondents at Mahlahluvani showed that they spent an average of 15.5 days per month on the land over the course of the year (June 2006 to May 2007), with time input peaking during the months of December to February. Fifteen farmers reported that a second person from their household assisted them on their plot, and a further six reported that two or more people from their household occasionally assisted them. Eight farmers reported that they occasionally hired non-household members to assist them, rang-

³⁰ The average size of agricultural land prior to joining the land occupation was estimated at 1.4 ha (n = 9).

ing from one to three workers at a time. Farmers and labourers reported that the standard wage at Mahlahluvani was R30 per day for adults, and R20 for school children who worked during the weekends and school holidays.

All 42 plot-holders grew maize and at least two other crops, the most common being squashes (25 plot-holders), groundnuts (21), beans (11), sweet potatoes (7), fruit trees (3), cabbage (2) and sugar cane (2).

The main purchased input used was maize seed; 30 farmers said that they purchased maize seed for the agricultural year in question (2005/06), while 12 reported that they used seed retained from the previous year's harvest. The value of seed purchased ranged from R45 to R1 800, with an average of R205. Fifteen farmers purchased groundnuts for seed, spending a maximum of R380, five purchased beans (maximum of R360), two purchased pumpkin seeds (maximum R60) and just one reported purchasing cabbage seed (R9). No other purchased inputs were used by the majority of farmers. Just two said they purchased fertiliser (for maize), spending R185 and R329 respectively. Two farmers also reported purchasing pesticide powder, again for application to maize, spending R90 and R140 respectively.

Wild resources

Apart from the crops they produce themselves, farmers at Mahlahluvani also benefit from a variety of wild resources that they gather on their plots and in the adjoining areas. During December and January, farmers gather a range of wild fruits, which they give to their children or sell in the village. Such fruits include granadillas, *tinyiri*, *titoma* (or *tintoma*) and *tithondwa*. When the farmers have finished with harvesting their crops (usually by May or June), many use their time to cut firewood for use at home or to sell in their villages. Some also cut wood for sculpting or for carving items such as wooden spoons and chairs for their own use or for sale. Daniel Khumalo indicated that each day when he returned home from the fields he took at least one piece of wood that he used to make wooden spoons for sale to his neighbours. Other resources gathered by farmers at Mahlahluvani include thatching grass, wild spinach and medicinal herbs. Grace Hlungwani, who is both a farmer and an *inyanga* (traditional healer) reported that she regularly gathers plants, such as a herb called *manungwana*, which she uses to treat her patients for complaints like coughs, high blood pressure and

cancer. Occasionally, animals such as wild pigs are hunted for food or for their skins, which are used in traditional clothing, although this is not a very frequent occurrence.

Support services

When they first reoccupied the land, the Mahlahluvani farmers received occasional visits from the extension officer of the provincial DoA, but once they were labelled as illegal occupiers these visits ceased. Farmers currently receive no support from the DoA, the DLA or the local municipality. No tribal authority is directly involved with the occupation or with the Mahlahluvani restitution claim, although the three other competing claims are all framed in terms of historical tribal jurisdiction. The Makhado local municipality has been involved in providing services such as electricity to the extension of Mashau village that is located on Welgevonden, but neither the local nor the Vhembe district municipality has provided any support to the Mahlahluvani farmers. While this can be understood, in part, in terms of the informal (or 'illegal') nature of the Mahlahluvani settlement, other more formally established land reform projects in the area do not appear to receive any local government support either.

Mahlahluvani farmers were assisted in lodging their land claim by the Nkuzi Development Association, which has also provided legal services as the community members have been drawn into court proceedings that aim to remove them from the land. No direct agricultural support has been provided by Nkuzi or any other NGO, however.

During 2006, four farmers from Mahlahluvani were among a group who received training in bee-keeping from the Agricultural Research Council. Members lost interest, however, when they were informed they would have to pay R100 in order to receive their own beehive.

Benefits and livelihood impacts

The main material benefits for members of Mahlahluvani flow from their individual arable plots, with lesser contributions coming from the harvesting of wild resources found on the land. The arable plots produce a supply of food for producers' households over a prolonged period, starting as early as January with the picking of pumpkin leaves; by early March, most farmers are

One day's harvest at Mahlahluvani

One of our researcher team, Marc Wegerif, spent a day working in the fields with Morgan Sithole (Xikhalamazulu) and his family, and wrote a detailed account of his experience (see Appendix 2). The following extract summarises the produce brought home from the fields on that day:

We were carrying fresh maize cobs, from some late-planted maize, that the household would eat today, tomatoes, pumpkin leaves and flowers, a large pumpkin, peanuts, sweet potatoes and two different types of wood, one that would be used to cook the meal and one to build with. We also had a sack of dry maize cobs that they are moving bit by bit down the hill before taking it for grinding at the mill in the next village. I realised we were carrying everything the family would need to eat and cook that evening, aside from water and the maize-meal that they had left at home from last year's crop.

taking some green maize cobs home with them every day, and consuming others while working in the fields. Morgan Sithole (Xikhalamazulu) reported that every working day from March to May he takes home ten or twelve maize cobs for his two wives and his two grandsons, and occasionally more if he wishes to share with relatives and friends (see box).

The total amount of maize harvested varied greatly between households (not surprisingly, given the widely divergent size of plots), from less than 100 kg to 6 000 kg. Most households (28) reported harvesting between 200 kg and 1 000 kg, but the average harvest, at 929 kg, was pushed up by a few relatively large producers. All producers reported consuming some or all of the maize they produced, with just five households (including the four biggest producers) selling a surplus. The average amount of maize reported as consumed within producer households was 760 kg over the year. The biggest producer, Jackson Hlungwani, reported selling 70 bags (approximately 80 kg each, or 5 600 kg in total), yielding an income of R12 000. All of these figures are based on the main maize harvest, when maize is bagged and stored (at least temporarily). It excludes the considerable volume of 'green mealies' harvested during the growing season and consumed by households as a fresh vegetable (see below).

Other crops were consumed almost entirely within the producer households. Exceptions were two farmers who each reported selling a bakkie load of beans (estimated at between 500 kg and 700 kg), one who sold a single 50 kg bag of groundnuts, three who sold varying amounts of sweet potatoes (the maximum being 1 500 kg) and one who sold approximately 150 cabbages.

All sales were made through local informal markets.

The maize harvest makes a substantial contribution to the maize meal requirements of the households concerned.³¹ Of the 42 households, 12 (28.6%) obtained less than 50% of the maize needed for their own consumption, 17 (40.5%) obtained between 50% and 100% and 13 (30.9%) obtained more than 100%. In comparison, at Dikgolo 51.3% of households obtained 50% or more of their annual maize needs, and at Mahlahluvani the corresponding figure was 79.7%. In all, 15 households at Mahlahluvani managed to produce sufficient maize to meet all of their needs for the year.

As well as making a substantial contribution to household nutrition, food crops are important in freeing up cash reserves for other necessities. Morgan Sithole said that he supports his two grandchildren with the produce from the occupied land, saving money that he would otherwise use to buy maize meal and spending it instead on clothes and school fees. Modjadji Maluleke, who started ploughing on the land in 1996 after her husband passed away, said that for the past ten years her four children have never gone to bed hungry, thanks to what she produces on her plot. She can also buy food and clothing for her children and pays school fees with the money she generates from the occasional sale of produce. She consumes much of the produce but also manages to share some with relatives. Isaiah Ndhambi has one of the largest plots, and in 2005/06 produced 37 bags of maize, which he shared with his relatives and other families in the village.

³¹ Based on the formula of 160 kg per annum for adults and 80 kg for children.

All 42 members said that they felt their lives had improved as a result of joining the Mahlahluvani group and accessing the land. When asked what the main problems facing them as farmers were, a high proportion (37 out of 42) highlighted their feelings of insecurity on the land. Ongoing efforts were being made by DWAF to restrict their access to the land, and their feelings of insecurity were increased in late 2005 when the RLCC began serving them with various legal papers ordering them to cease production and vacate the land, under threat of court action. Considerably fewer respondents (11 out of 42) cited lack of equipment and infrastructure as major problems, with particular reference being made to the lack of fencing for their plots, difficulties in de-bushing the plots, poor road access and the need for a proper irrigation system for their winter crops. Six respondents also mentioned problems with theft from their plots and damage caused by livestock from neighbouring villages. In January and May 2007, the farmers reported confrontations with Zimbabwean migrants who, they claimed, were sleeping in the mountains and stealing crops, tools and cooking pots from their fields. In the May incident, several farmers were injured by sticks and stones, but they managed to recover a variety of tools and cooking pots that had been stolen from them. In a focus group with women farmers, a number of women also reported that they fear for their personal safety when they are working in the fields or walking the long distance to or from their homes, and so they tend to travel and work in a group.

Apart from the material benefits to be obtained from the land, members of the Mahlahluvani community stressed the social benefits of belonging to such a collective enterprise. As outlined above, the shared experience of reclaiming their land, the time spent together working on the land and the hostility they have experienced from both state officials and some members of surrounding communities has created a strong sense of solidarity and belonging. This is further enhanced by the sense of rebuilding a community that was scattered, but not destroyed, by apartheid forced removals, and the spirit of mutual support that pervades all their activities. This is evident in the collective approach to decision-making, the lack of formal leadership structures, mutual assistance with farming and willingness to make land available to all members of the community who are in need, regardless of their historical connection to the land.

Analysis and recommendations

Farmers at Mahlahluvani produce only local, mainly rain-fed food crops that are consumed largely within their own households, with relatively small quantities being traded through local informal markets. The low utilisation of purchased inputs, other than seed, and the reliance on hand cultivation and household labour further emphasise the non-commercial nature of this production. These factors, together with the considerable effort involved in clearing land of natural bush and forestry tree stumps, also impose limits on the volume of crops that can be produced. This model of low external input, consumption-oriented farming cannot strictly be described as subsistence, as households typically have access to other sources of income (wages, welfare grants or remittances) and depend on these to obtain certain agricultural inputs. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that this production provides the primary supply of staple foods for all, or virtually all, the households at Mahlahluvani and for a minority (those with little or no cash income) it is the primary source of livelihood.³² While it is difficult to calculate the precise value of this contribution to household food supply, it is undoubtedly significant and a major benefit to the households concerned.

While Mahlahluvani is clearly exceptional in terms of land reform projects – being effectively an unauthorised land occupation in the context of an as yet unsettled restitution claim – it reveals a lot about the desire of poor rural people to access land for food production and the potential of small-scale agriculture under favourable conditions.

Mahlahluvani farmers do not conform to the standard model of an agricultural 'project' of the type being promoted through the official land reform programme. The group has no 'business plan' and while some collective action was involved in taking possession of the land, and solidarity amongst the group remains strong, production is entirely on the basis of individual (or household) plots. After a decade on the land, it is surely significant that no steps have been taken towards collective forms of production, nor does this look likely in the future. Production centres on familiar food crops for the household's own consumption, with surplus often being disposed of to relatives or neighbours. While some surplus may be sold, production, in all but one case, is clearly not organised for the

³² Eight households (19% of the total) had no regular source of cash income; a further 15 (36%) earned less than R1 000 per month.

market, which would imply much higher usage of purchased inputs and labour (paid or unpaid), as well as marketing skills, and a level of risk that would not be acceptable to most of these producers. Despite the availability of relatively fertile land and favourable rainfall, farmers are constrained by the amount of labour and capital they can reasonably invest in production, by their aversion to risk and by the limited marketing channels (including transportation) available to them.

The Mahlahluvani farmers have managed thus far without support from the state or other external agencies – indeed, the attention they have received from officials has been almost entirely negative. As other cases in this study show, however, this neglect by the state cannot be attributed solely to the ‘illegal’ nature of their land occupation, and the potential benefit of greater involvement by either the DLA or the provincial DoA is certainly an open question. The project approach being taken by these departments (‘collective commercial farming’ for groups of relatively poor people, individual commercial farming for the better-off LRAD beneficiaries, and, more recently, ‘strategic partnerships’ with the private sector on high-value land) would be unlikely to offer much benefit to the people of Mahlahluvani. It is perhaps significant that among the proposals from the official Mahlahluvani land claim committee is one to establish a macadamia orchard – a proposal characteristic of better-off people who have no desire to work the land themselves and no interest in producing food crops for their own consumption, very similar to the opposing interests revealed in the Shimange study (see Chapter 6).

The environmental conditions in the Mahlahluvani area reveal much about the potential for small-scale production of food crops under rain-fed conditions. Much of the land reform that has occurred in Limpopo to date, as at Dikgolo and Monyamane, has involved marginal land that is poorly suited to dry-land cropping of either vegetables or cereals. Mahlahluvani, however, with its sub-tropical climate, relatively high rainfall and plentiful surface water is well suited to production of maize and other crops in summer and a range of vegetables in winter. Cropping under such conditions presents multiple advantages, compared to cropping or livestock farming in dryer areas, among them the ability to sustain a greater number of people on a given area of land, the possibility of individual (household) production, as opposed to collective farming,

the relatively high intensity of labour required, and a flow of immediately consumable products for producers over many months. At the same time, the evidence from Mahlahluvani suggests that while a focus on intensive production of food crops using minimal external inputs brings tangible benefits to poor households, it is unlikely to contribute much to direct cash income (although it does have a substitution effect) or to allow for production much beyond the household food needs, due to the constraints associated with clearing and cultivating land by hand and the difficulties associated with disposing of an irregular surplus (in terms of both transportation and access to reliable markets).

Limited opportunities present themselves for enhancing the livelihoods of farmers at Mahlahluvani. A substantial expansion of agricultural production would require the adoption of more capital-intensive methods, which may not be acceptable to the farmers even if credit were provided, given the risks involved, the relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy and the farmers’ limited resources. Greater capital intensity through mechanisation, more use of purchased inputs or a switch to alternative crops (such as forestry or macadamias) could also lead to the marginalisation of current producers or their conversion into poorly paid labourers. The introduction of a ‘strategic partner’ interested in purely commercial activities (a likely outcome of the land claim) would almost certainly mean the end of the current production of food crops using household labour. Rather, ways need to be found of adding value to current activities that provide direct benefit to the present land users without exposing them to unacceptable levels of risk. A number of measures can be recommended.

First, it is important to secure the land rights of the current occupiers. Their status as informal (or ‘illegal’) occupiers in the midst of a complex land claim is clearly problematic, but can be improved. As people with a strong claim to the land in question, and who reoccupied unused forestry land long before the formal restitution claim was gazetted in 2004, there appears to be little moral or legal basis for the harassment they receive from state officials. While white occupiers facing claims on their land are generally at liberty to continue using their land up to the point at which a land claim is formally settled and they are suitably compensated (within certain restrictions on their freedom to dispose of the land or

bring about major structural change), black occupiers are treated here as squatters without rights and as a hindrance to the orderly settlement of the restitution claim. The Mahlahluvani occupation appears to be on portions of land that are not being claimed by other groups (despite what is stated in the various restitution claim forms), and there appears to be little objection from the broader Mahlahluvani land claimant group to the existing allocation of individual plots for cultivation. Rather, opposition to the occupation comes mainly from the RLCC and DWAF, who appear to have little interest in small-scale agriculture. Strengthening the tenure security of the current occupiers, in the short term, would require nothing more than tolerance on behalf of the relevant authorities. In the longer term, the model of individual plots established by the Mahlahluvani farmers, who are nearly all members of the Mahlahluvani land claim community, provides a template that could be adopted by the wider community, and which stands in contrast to the models currently being promoted by the state.

Possibilities also exist for enhancing agricultural productivity and strengthening solidarity among the farmers, through building on existing practices. A variety of services could be provided by either state agencies or NGOs in this regard, including the following:

- a rudimentary and accessible extension service that would provide advice on crop

selection, cultivation practices, pest control and fertilisation, geared to the needs of resource-poor producers;

- support for land preparation through provision of mechanical services or support to private individuals able to offer either tractor or animal ploughing services;
- assistance and advice on collective purchasing of seeds and other inputs, and delivery to the fields;
- assistance and advice on small-scale marketing of surplus crops, including transportation; and
- technical advice and material support for small-scale irrigators wishing to use low-technology solutions and available surface water.

Finally, assisting people to settle in temporary or permanent accommodation on the land should be explored, possibly as part of the resolution of the restitution claim. Members of the Mahlahluvani group say that their current residential areas are overcrowded and far from their fields. The creation of settlements on the occupied land would bring many challenges in terms of service provision but should be explored, both as an end in itself and as a means of enhancing agricultural productivity. This could be achieved through the provision of a communal borehole and taps, pit latrines and cleared sites for the construction of houses by the farmers themselves, rather than the more elaborate development associated with a formal township.

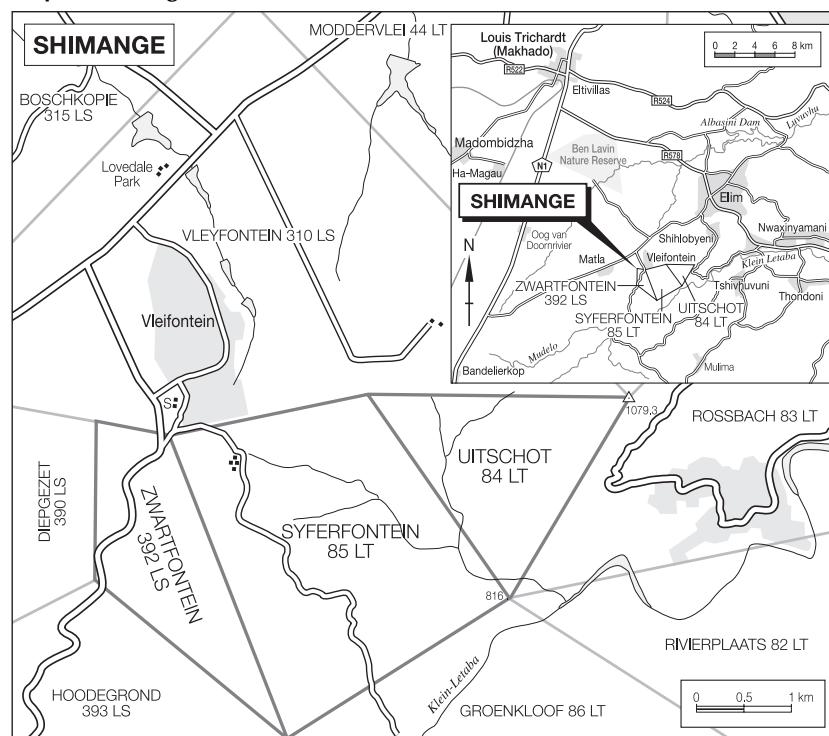
Chapter 6: Shimange case study

Background

The Shimange clan originated in Mozambique, where a chief called Nkukwana left the Xihaheni district and trekked with his people to the area that they called Vudyodyodyo, which later became the farms Syferfontein 85 LT and Uitschot 84 LT (see Map 6).³³ In the 1850s, a son was born to Nkukwana and was named Shimange, who eventually took over the leadership of the clan. In the 1890s, Syferfontein was obtained by its first white owner, Veldkornet Tom Kelly, as part of the gradual incursion of white settlers into the far northern Transvaal. The land remained in Kelly's family until 1916 when it was sold to Rev. N. Jacques; in 1969, the Jacques family sold the farm to a certain Mr Henning. The farm was used for cattle and maize production, and a mission school was operated from the farm.³⁴ The mission was known as Ephrata, and today most people in the area know the land as Ephrata rather than Vudyodyodyo. The land is situated approximately 20 km south-east of Makhado town (formerly Louis Trichardt), 13 km south-west of Elim and lies immediately to the south of the Vleifontein township.

The Shimange people were not immediately removed from their land with the arrival of white settlers in the 1890s, but continued living on it with access to ploughing fields, grazing, water and other natural resources. From about 1936, however, the resident households were subjected to forced labour of three to nine months in exchange for permission to live on the farm, in line with the then government's policy of labour tenancy. As with other farms in the area, those who refused to work were ordered to leave. Between 1957 (when the first *trekpasses* were issued) and 1972, the Shimange community was forcibly removed from Syferfontein and Uitschot, without any form of compensation. The majority, who were Shangaan-speakers, were scattered around the newly established Tsonga/Shangaan 'homeland' of Gazankulu. Some Venda-speakers went to nearby areas such as Nthabalala in the former Venda homeland. Subsequent to the removals, in 1976, the farm was purchased by the South African Development Trust (SADT) to add to the Venda homeland. In later years, the farm fell into disuse and the area became greatly overgrown. The land was reportedly used by

Map 6: Shimange



³³ 'Shimange' is also commonly spelt as 'Ximange'. Here, we have chosen to use 'Shimange'.

³⁴ This historical background is based on documents prepared by the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC) as part of the settlement of the Shimange restitution claim (including copies of title deeds), affidavits in the office of the Nkuzi Development Association, Elim, and interviews with members of the Shimange community.

people from the adjoining Vleifontein township to graze their cattle and to cultivate small plots of maize. Prior to the return of the land, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) used the farm buildings as a depot for staff and equipment.

As early as the 1980s, under the leadership of Chief Xitlhangoma Baloyi, the Shimange clan formed the Shimange Reconstruction and Development Committee in order to reclaim their lost land and, on 27 December 1995, Mr Risenga Freddy Baloyi, on behalf of the clan, lodged a restitution claim with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR). Members of the committee insist that their intention was to claim the entire historical territory of Vudyodyodyo (i.e. the farms of Syferfontein 85 LT and Uitschot 84 LT), with some members of the community stating they the claim should have included the neighbouring farm of Zwartfontien 392 LS as well. However, the land claim form recognised by the office of the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC) for Limpopo indicates that a claim was lodged for Syferfontein 85LT only.³⁵

A communal property association (CPA) was formed at a meeting of the community facilitated by the Nkuzi Development Association. A committee composed of five executive members and four additional members was elected. As the land belonged to the state, and the claim was not contested, the claim was settled through an administrative process, whereby the minister approved the settlement according to section 42D of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994, restoring the farm Syferfontein 85 LT to the Shimange clan, as represented by the Shimange CPA.³⁶ The settlement left out the farms Uitschot and Zwartfontein, which remains a matter of dispute between the community and the RLCC. When owned by white people, these properties were always owned and operated as one. Members of the Shimange community reported that they were unaware that, in terms of the deeds registry, these were in fact two separate properties, which may explain the omission of Uitschot from the original land claim form. This matter was raised by the Shimange Land Claims Committee in 2001, when they became aware of the problem during the settlement of the claim, but the RLCC ignored their complaint and proceeded to settle a claim on Syferfontein alone, on the basis that this was the only property mentioned in the official claim form submitted to the RLCC, and the RLCC did not have the power to amend a claim form once it had been lodged.

The settlement agreement describes the land to be restored to the Shimange community, how the land will be owned and the development support that the government and its agents will provide. With regard to development assistance, the agreement promises the release of planning grants to the CPA, and that the RLCC will approach the Makhado Local Municipality, the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Department of Local Government and Housing to support the CPA in accessing all necessary grants available in order to assist in land development.³⁷ The agreement also provides that the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) will release Restitution Discretionary Grants (RDGs) and Settlement Planning Grants (SPGs) to assist the Shimange community to develop their property, but the total value of such grants is not specified. It was only later, when the RLCC commissioned consultants for the development of the Land Use and Development Plan (LUDP), that the values of these grants were estimated. The LUDP states that there are 250 'households' and 700 'beneficiaries' (defined as adult members of households) in all and, thus, estimates that the Shimange community is entitled to R1 008 000 in SPGs and a further R875 000 in RDGs, a total cash amount of R1 883 000 in addition to the land that was restored to them.

Following the settlement of the claim, a number of community members moved into the old farmhouses and began clearing small plots for the cultivation of food crops. This was contrary to the LUDP proposed by the consultants appointed by the RLCC, and was opposed by the CPA committee and the RLCC. Over the next five years, divisions within the community resulted in virtually no implementation of the terms of the settlement agreement, no developments on the land and no transfer of grants from the RLCC to the CPA. Against this background, members of the community have continued to use part of the land and farm buildings on a small scale, and they constitute the focus of this case study.

The Shimange CPA

After a series of meetings to discuss what type of legal entity was most suitable for their purposes, the Shimange community chose a CPA over a trust; they suggested that it was easier to set up and that it stipulated democratic processes, accountability, transparency and equality of membership. Supported by the RLCC and the Nkuzi Development Association, the community undertook the process of drafting a constitution

³⁵ Letter from RLCC Gilfillan, dated 22.07.99; original land claim form dated 27.12.95.

³⁶ Signed settlement options resolution, 01.03.01.

³⁷ Settlement agreement entered into between the Shimange CPA and the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs (Ms A.T. Didiza), signed 02.03.02.

for the CPA. As a result, the Shimange CPA was registered on 10 May 2002 (Reg. No: CPA/o2/o427/A). Although the constitution developed by this consultative processes involving the RLCC, community members and an NGO was used for the registration of the CPA, a second version was developed at a later stage by the 'main' CPA committee in the months that followed (i.e. around April 2002). The second constitution differs from the original one in that it provides that traditional leadership can play a role in the affairs of the CPA. It specifically mentions that the traditional head of the community, the 'President-Chief Designate', will be the 'President' of the committee.³⁸

According to a list of verified members drawn up by the RLCC, the CPA has 414 members. These members are victims of land dispossession at Ephrata and/or their direct descendants who were over the age 18 years at the time of verification. The 2001 Shimange CPA constitution also provides that anyone who in the future can prove that they lost such land rights may be added as a member. In the initial stage, the CPA committee comprised of 12 members, with five executive officers. Of the executive, only two are based in Limpopo, the remaining three being in other provinces of South Africa. Of those staying in Limpopo, one is based in Giyani, about 70 km from the farm, and sometimes stays on the farm. The committee comprises mainly urban-based professionals and full-time business people. As a result, the affairs of the CPA, including negotiations with the RLCC for the release of outstanding grant funding, have made little progress as members have other interests that keep them away from Shimange.

In response to the desire for some development on the farm, a subcommittee, known as the 'local committee', was constituted in 2004, in order to assist in the management of day-to-day affairs on the farm, but this committee does not have the authority to make decisions. The committee comprises five CPA members and two members of the executive who are resident on the farm and in the surrounding area's villages and townships. The relationship between this subcommittee and the main CPA committee (the so-called 'Jo'burg committee') remains unclear, and sometimes tense, and members reported that they feel they do not have power to make decisions without the agreement of the main CPA committee, which seldom meets. Although the CPA committee deputy-chairperson resides in Giyani, and is a member of the local committee, he re-

ported that he too feels powerless and is not in a position to make decisions about the running of the project, including meeting the RLCC to request the release of development support grants or the allocation of further residential sites. As far as could be established, the RLCC does not recognise the 'local committee' and insists on dealing only with the elected executive of the CPA.

Initiatives to allocate fields, to allow more people to farm with livestock and to plant orchards have been discouraged by the main committee because of its vision of running the farm commercially as a single entity. The local committee has also been hampered by opposition from the main CPA committee: 'When we try to organise meetings to discuss how we can access services and ensure that the farm is fully operational, the main committee instructs the local committee to wait for the main committee, whose majority are in Gauteng. They say that they will contact the RLCC and the Department of Land Affairs. So we are always waiting for the committee to contact the RLCC, but they have not made any progress' (Focus Group Discussion, Shimange 16.10.06).

In terms of its constitution, the CPA is supposed to meet regularly, hold AGMs and carry out other activities, but none of this has happened in five years. The Communal Property Associations Act 28 of 1996 provides for the monitoring of CPAs, and for interventions by the director-general of the DLA, where necessary, but no action of this sort has been initiated so far. Most importantly, the RLCC has made no effort to intervene to revive the CPA, to protect the interests of the members, or to compel it to meet its legal obligations.

Members of the Shimange CPA who stay on the farm are frustrated because their leadership structures are not functional and the leadership is not available to meet people and explain to them the delays in the release of grants and in promised developments such as water and electricity. Members are also frustrated because the government agencies are not communicating with them. Officials of the RLCC reported they were frustrated by the divisions within the community. The people on Uitschot farm have minimal dealings with the CPA structures, and none with official agencies, and, although they expressed concern about the lack of clarity around their land rights, they did not appear to be greatly threatened by this.

³⁸The first and second CPA constitutions are dated 22.12.01 and 27.04.02, respectively.

Although the formal processes for settlement of the claim for Syferfontein were finalised in 2002, by May 2007 the Shimange CPA had still not received the title deeds for that property and the land remained registered in the name of the SADT. The RLCC has emphasised that there is a need to get all planning work finished in order to ensure that beneficiaries use the land in accordance with the settlement agreement before the title deeds can be handed over. However, planning work is currently at a halt because of internal problems in the CPA, as described above.

Profile of current land users at Shimange

More than 20 people were found staying on the farms of Syferfontein and Uitschot at various times during the course of our research. Some of these people occupied the old farmhouses, while others were constructing their own dwellings. Not all of them were involved in productive activities on the land. However, all of them appeared to have other homes away from the farms, which they visited on occasion, some on a monthly basis and others more frequently. In addition, several people were identified who did not stay overnight on the farm but who commuted from nearby villages to cultivate plots on the land. Following initial inquiries, and focus-group discussions with all the people found on the farms on two different occasions, a total of 11 households were identified that were involved in some form of productive activity on the farm. Eight of the 11 households were on Syferfontein and three were on Uitschot. Representatives of all 11 households were interviewed in depth, and were visited on a number of occasions over the course of 20 months.

Of the 11 respondents, eight were women and three were men. Previously, six of them had been living within 5 km of the land: at Waterval township (2 persons), Ribungwane village (2), Bungeni village (1) and Mbokota village (1). Five were living much further away, in Gauteng Province (3) and Bushbuckridge (2). All retained their homes in these places, despite taking up occupation of the Shimange land and living there during the week. Respondents' household sizes were smaller than in any other case study, at 4.8 persons per household. The age profile of farmers was also considerably younger, at 48 years on average; almost half the respondents (5 out of 11) were under 40 years of age.

Farmers at Shimange began using the land between 2002 and 2005. They had allocated themselves individual arable plots, which varied greatly in size from 0.1 ha to approximately 10 ha. No collective activities were being undertaken in terms of agricultural production, although people did work together to repair the roads on the farm and to clean up the old farmhouses and sheds. No attempt has been made to implement the elaborate, yet vague, proposals for centralised farm management contained in the 'official' LUDP, due in part to the delays in releasing promised development funding and the ongoing divisions within the claimant community, but also because the plan does not appear to enjoy the support of these active members.

Respondents at Shimange had the highest household non-farm income of any of the four case studies, an average of R5 541 per month; seven had less than R3 000 per month, but four had in excess of R4 000 (with one household having a combined cash income of R24 000 per month). This can be related to the nature of the Shimange project, as a restitution rather than a Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) project (and, therefore, lacking any screening of applicants on socio-economic grounds) and the nature of the Shimange community, which is known for its history of education and professional achievement. It also differs from Mahlahluvani, the other restitution case (albeit unsettled at the time of research), in that it appears to have attracted a wider range of people to the land, including people with substantial household incomes interested in farming on a commercial or semi-commercial scale. Such people may exist within the Mahlahluvani community, but probably have been deterred from occupying the land to date by the lack of official approval for the occupation and by the emphasis on small-scale food production by its relatively poor members.

Land description

The land restored to the Shimange CPA was unallocated state land, which contained an old graveyard, various outbuildings and the remnants of a cattle dip, holding pens, a dam, a small plantation and a pump house. The original farmhouse, dating from the 1880s, and an adjacent house built in the 1930s, both survived with their walls and roofs intact; however, all the farm buildings and infrastructure were old and neglected, and in need of considerable invest-

ment to make them workable. There was also a fence line from the north to the south and a gravel road running from the farm gate to the old houses. Prior to the handover of Syferfontein to the Shimange community, fences were cut, allegedly by people from the nearby township, because they were restricted from grazing and ploughing land that they had been using without permission for many years. The cutting of the fence was regarded as a sign that people in the neighbouring communities are not happy with the resettlement of the Shimange community on this land (Shimange focus-group discussion, 16.10.06).

The farm Syferfontein 85 LT is 718.87 ha in extent, and the adjoining farm Uitschot 84 LT is 311.46 ha. The topography of the area can be described as broken foothills and undulating land, lying at an altitude of between 805 m and 1 074 m. The farms contain numerous springs and a wetland area, which form part of the upper reaches of the Letaba catchment. The area is frost-free, with average minimum temperatures of 8° C and a maximum of 31° C. It is a summer-rainfall area with a mean annual precipitation of 612 mm. The area's geology is largely Goudplaats Gneiss, and the soil is deep and fertile in parts: 'The soils in the majority of the farm are soils with minimal development, usually shallow on hard weathered rock, with or without intermittent diverse soils. Lime is rare or absent in the landscape. Depths are between 450 mm and 750 mm on average. In the valley, the deeper soils are found.' (Shimange LUDP 2004: 9)

As part of the settlement agreement between the community and the state, the community was required to prepare a business plan, for which the state would provide funding. An outline business plan was prepared by the leadership of the CPA in March 2002 and contained plans for resettlement and agricultural development, including construction of access roads, water reticulation, fencing, electrification, agricultural projects (tropical fruit production, vines, cattle ranching, dairy, chicken rearing and pig farming), refurbishment of farm buildings, debushing and construction of latrines. The plan estimated that a budget of R9.35 million was needed to get the farm running again. No steps have been taken to implement this plan.

A needs-assessment exercise by Nkuzi in 2002 revealed a demand for the creation of a residential area of approximately 70 ha, a business area of about 10 ha, and provision of land for differ-

ent forms of farming (livestock, game, horticulture and crop farming), both for growing food and for generating cash income. This exercise showed that the intention of the community was to live on the land as they used to do before it was taken from them. They aspired to farm their fields, to supply their families with food, to create job opportunities through farming and to grow commercially when possible.

In 2004, the RLCC appointed consultants, Northplan, to prepare the LUDP for the Shimange community. According to the plan document, it was adopted by the community on 24 November 2004, although the accompanying attendance list shows that only eight members of the community were present. No effort has been made to implement the vision contained in the LUDP, and interviews with community members revealed little support for the commercial farming model it proposes. This raises serious questions about the nature of the consultation process and the relevance of this plan to the needs and aspirations of community members.

The LUDP consists of a long list of options for land use, but is lacking in concrete proposals and clearly does not constitute a business plan. In fact, the document suggests that the community must develop more specific business plans for the farm. This plan proposes a unitary commercial farm model, and discourages human settlement on the land: 'No urban settlement is going to take place and the farm will be operated as a commercial farm' (Shimange LUDP 2004: 9). The LUDP makes no reference to the existing skills or resources of the Shimange community, how the farm would be managed (or by whom), or how a single commercial farming operation could meet the needs of over 250 households.

The LUDP dealt only with the restored property of Syferfontein, which it divides into three sections, as follows:

- Area A, of approximately 150 ha, which could be used for biodiversity and water preservation;
- Area B, of approximately 459 ha, which could be used for grazing (it further states that both A and B could be used for cattle and/or game farming, and that Area B could support 100 cattle at 5 ha per large stock unit (LSU); and
- Area C, of approximately 110 ha, which is regarded as good arable land (Area C was further divided into 49 ha of crops, 11 ha of intensive livestock, 25 ha of horticulture and 25 ha of mixed use).

The report concludes that the farm is suitable mainly for dry-land farming, deciduous fruit and cattle and game farming. It proposes that the Shimange CPA must 'prepare a business plan for the renovation and use of the existing building structures on the farm; apply to the municipality for the provision of electricity; and prepare an agricultural business plan for each of the proposed agricultural activities' (Shimange LUDP 2004: 10). No such business plan has been developed as yet, although members of the community and officials of the RLCC refer to the LUDP as a business plan.

Land use

Crop farming

On the Shimange farms, production centres on rain-fed maize and the cultivation of a range of vegetables using improvised systems of irrigation. Maize is intended largely for household consumption, whereas vegetables are intended for sale at local formal and informal markets. Thus, Shimange is the only one of the four case studies where crop production is undertaken specifically for sale (i.e. on a 'commercial' basis), although production remains very limited in scale, and marketing channels are not well established. During the agricultural year in question (2005/06), six households grew maize, and all grew between two and four other crops as well. These included groundnuts, sweet potatoes, chillies, tomatoes, beans, sugar cane, beetroot, onions and a variety of fruit.

Most of the work on the arable plots is done by the plot-holders, assisted by members of their households, but external labour is also employed, far more so than in the other three cases. Three men said that their wives worked with them all the time, and two women said their husbands assisted them on occasions; one woman said that her sons helped her at busy times such as ploughing and weeding. Six people said that they had employed non-household members at times during the year, particularly for land preparation, weeding and harvesting. Workers are employed either on a daily basis or on a piecework basis. Daily rates were reported as either R30 or R35. For piecework, they are paid a flat rate for a particular job, regardless of how long it takes; for example, one plot-holder employed a person to assist with land clearance, and paid him R900 for approximately one month's work. Another employed two male Zimbabwean migrants to clear

the land, and paid them R1 000 between the two, while a third employed two local women to weed her plot and paid them R300 each (for approximately one month's work).

At first, plot-holders used their own hand tools to de-bush the fields, but later the provincial DoA provided a bulldozer, which greatly assisted them. The Nkuzi Development Association provided diesel for the bulldozer and it was driven by an official from the DoA. For the agricultural year under investigation, two farmers had hired tractors to plough their land, paying R500 each for plots of between one and two hectares in extent; all others who produced a crop prepared the land using hoes.

A rudimentary system of irrigation has been implemented on Syferfontein, using pipes supplied by the Nkuzi Development Association with grant funding obtained from the National Development Agency (NDA). The pipes carry water from a number of natural springs downhill to the arable fields, without the aid of a pump, and are dragged into position around the plots as required. Water is delivered to the crops using an improvised drip system. Competition for the pipes has led to some disputes, with members accusing each other of treating them as their private property.

Among the cultivators is a married couple, Siphon and Constance. In their first year on the farm, 2004, they planted a hectare of cabbages, beetroots and onions, all under irrigation. The following year they planted tomatoes, spinach, beetroot and onions. They reported a good harvest. Seven crates of tomatoes, two crates of beetroots and a crate of onions were sold to hawkers operating at the local township markets, but people also came to the farm to buy directly. In the first year, they did not buy many inputs, because they obtained seedlings in a 'starter pack' provided by the DoA when Siphon attended a training course. He purchased '3-2-3' fertiliser from the NTK shop in Makhado with money he was given by his parents. In the seasons that followed, he bought seeds from NTK Makhado and from a shop in Vleifontein. Production from this field provides food for their extended family at home in the village and for Siphon and Constance while they are staying on the farm: 'Last time when we had a funeral for my brother, we were able to get tomatoes, onions and cabbages from this plot. We saved a lot of money because vegetables are expensive in the village.'

Other people who have reliable sources of off-farm income are able to cultivate bigger portions. One member, who is the secretary of the CPA and a teacher, has cleared approximately five hectares of land, which he is irrigating; he uses the land on a more commercial basis than any of the other farmers. This household is in a position to employ casual labour, purchase inputs and generally farm on a bigger scale than others. They produce spinach, chillies and green peas. They have used Landman Vervoer in Levubu to transport and market produce in Johannesburg, but feel that this was not a good option as some of the produce rotted before it reached Johannesburg and other produce remained unsold, with the result that they lost money. They now prefer to sell their produce locally, including to shops in Makhado town: 'Transporting the produce to the local shops costs me only R30, increasing my chances of making a profit'. The family employs one worker throughout the year who is paid R700 a month. They also employ seasonal workers for weeding and harvesting, paying R25 per day. Their sons occasionally assist them on the plot. Total costs for inputs for 2004 were estimated at R600 for seeds, fertilisers, repairing irrigation pipes and cultivation, excluding labour and transport. The family reported that this five-hectare plot makes an important contribution to the household diet and income: 'Our life has changed now because we can make extra income from the fields to supplement our household income. Some of the produce such as spinach, cabbage and onions have been used for household consumption' (Interview 2.11.05).

Plots on Uitschot farm are larger than most of those on Syferfontein and generate a wider range of produce, including fruit such as mango, avocado and pawpaw, as well as macadamia nuts. Small vegetable gardens have been established next to streams, from which the farmers carry water in buckets to irrigate their vegetables. One producer uses his own generator to pump water from a natural spring to a small tank, from which water is fed to his vegetable plot via an earthen furrow. While the residents of Syferfontein are all living in the old farmhouses and storage buildings, two farmers on Uitschot have built permanent, traditional houses of mud brick and thatch, and one was in the process of constructing a modern house of cement blocks with a tiled roof.

One of the producers on Uitschot is Mr V, who moved onto the land in 2002 around the time the land claim was settled. He is a retired police-

man and works the land himself without employing anyone. He has cleared approximately seven hectares for himself and a further five hectares for his sister. The cost of clearing and fencing this area, including the hire of a tractor, amounted to R20 000, which he paid for out of his pension. From the initial harvest in 2003, he obtained 80 bags of maize (80 kg each), excluding the green mealies that were consumed at home and given to friends and relatives before the main harvest. The maize has been an important contribution to the household's food and income, because most of the maize was sold at informal markets in villages: 'This harvest has encouraged me to work hard because I realised that there is a potential to get returns from what I have invested using all my pension money' (Interview, 01/11/2005). On another plot, Ms M and her husband, both of whom are pensioners, use their pensions and other savings to purchase inputs for their plot. They have planted maize, groundnuts, sugar beans and sweet potatoes, and earned a cash income of approximately R3 000 in their first year (2004/05). They made slightly more the following year, but said that they were disappointed with the low yield, which they blamed on late rainfall.

For the six households on Syferfontein and Uitschot that produced maize, output ranged from 150 kg to 2 000 kg, with an average production for this group of 865 kg. Five households did not plant maize. In terms of meeting household maize needs, one of those who planted obtained less than half their maize needs, three obtained between 50% and 100%, and two obtained more than their annual needs. The highest proportion was 227% of household maize requirements, and the average for the group as a whole (including those who did not plant) was 56%. Excluding those that did not plant maize, the average rises to 103%. All but one of these households consumed the entire harvest within their households – the remaining household sold part of their harvest for R800.

Of the six who planted maize, three used retained seed and three used purchased seed, for which they paid between R210 and R1 000. Other types of seed purchased by plot-holders at Shimange included beans (three cases, with a maximum expenditure of R280), chillies (two cases, maximum R500), spinach (1 case, R120), groundnuts (1 case, R280) and beetroot (1 case, R40). In addition, five plot-holders purchased fertiliser for the year in question, spending between R18 and R450, or an average of R119 for this subgroup. Fertiliser was

applied to maize, spinach, sweet potatoes and cabbage, with the greatest single expenditure being on spinach. Four growers reported buying pesticide, spending between R7 (for application to cabbage) to R780 (for application to maize).

Seven plot-holders reported selling some or all of their vegetable production, which included tomatoes, chillies, sweet potatoes, spinach, beans, beetroot and groundnuts (see Table 11).

Respondent number 109, the highest seller in the group, was also the only one who sold maize during the year, bringing his total income from crop sales to R6 950.

Most of those who sold crops relied on small, informal transactions, selling either directly to consumers who called at the farm or to hawkers for resale in the surrounding villages. The two largest producers, however, sold most of their produce through relatively formal channels, including shops in Vleifontein and Makhado, and to a neighbouring white farmer who also acts as a dealer.

Livestock

Of the 11 respondents at Shimange, only two reported keeping cattle; one had kept sheep until the previous year, and the other was involved in poultry farming on a substantial scale. Lack of infrastructure on the farm, particularly fencing and accessible watering points, lack of security and a shortage of capital amongst the members all served as barriers to more intensive livestock production. Lack of certainty about the long-term development of the farm could also be seen as a disincentive to investing in livestock.

Just one respondent (Mr K) kept cattle on the farm during the period of research. He did not live on the farm and was not involved in any other productive activities there. Mr K had transported four mature cows from a nearby communal area, and these had produced two calves in the previous year, giving him a total herd of six. However, there were difficulties: 'I have problems with farming cattle on this farm because there are no camps, and other producers complain that my cattle interfere with crop farming. In addition, there is no water for drinking; as a result, I use my van to fetch water from Elim, approximately 13 km from the farm' (Interview 16.11.06).

Water has been the major expense for Mr K. According to him, there have not been any sales or benefits for his household, because they are spending so much on maintaining the cattle and building up a herd.

One other respondent (Mr V) reported that he owned four cattle, which he kept on communal land near Elim and was not planning to bring onto the Shimange land, as he did not stay there all the time and felt that they would not be safe. Ms M reported that she had sold six sheep (for R600 each) during the past two years, and now kept no livestock.

Sipho and Constance were involved in raising chickens on a commercial scale, having taken over the running of a 'project' that was originally intended to be operated collectively by the CPA. Nkuzi arranged for the construction of a poultry house and provided the first batch of 300 chicks and the necessary feed. Various mem-

Table 11: Sales of vegetables at Shimange, 2005/06

Respondent Number	Crop 1	Volume	Income (R)	Crop 2	Volume	Income (R)	Crop 3	Volume	Income (R)	Total income (R)
4	Tomatoes	6 crates	125	Spinach	500 bunches	1 000	Beetroot	20 boxes	300	1 425
8	Chillies	350 kg	1 200							1 200
10	Sweet potatoes	160 kg	400							400
66	Chillies	150 kg	500	Spinach	400 bunches	800	Beans	80 kg	350	1 650
67	Spinach	400 bunches	800							800
109	Beans	160 kg	650	Sweet potatoes	3 000 kg	2 500	Chillies	600	3 000	6 150
113	Sweet potatoes	640 kg	1 580	Groundnuts	500 kg	1 600				3 180

bers received training in poultry production. The people who were trained did not continue with the project, however, when they discovered that they would not be paid for the time spent working, and would only be entitled to a share of the profits. Siphso, as one of the members who had received training, expressed an interest in managing the project with his wife as a private enterprise, and this was supported by the other members, reportedly in the hope that he would grow it and employ more people from the community. The operation is still very basic, as there is neither electricity nor water supply to the poultry house. Water has to be purchased in Vleifontein township for R1 per 25 litre container and transported to the farm by bakkie. Wood and paraffin are burned to heat the chicken house.

During 2005/06, batches of 400 chicks were being reared and sold every eight to ten weeks. Chickens are sold at six to seven weeks old, for R23 each. The costs of production include the purchase of four boxes of chicks at R420 per box (R1 680 in total), feed (for starters, growers and finishers) at R3 152 per batch, and vaccines and other medicines at approximately R110. Thus, the total cost for a single batch of 400 chicks is estimated at R4 942. The net return to Siphso and his wife was approximately R4 250, which is effectively their salary for the eight to ten weeks required per batch of chicks. They are not making enough money to employ extra people at this stage.

Natural resources

Firewood was the main natural resource harvested by members at Shimange, with all respondents reporting that they collected firewood for their own use, while staying on the farm and at their other home. Firewood is particularly important for the couple who are keeping poultry, as they use wood stoves to heat the chicken houses during winter if no money is available for paraffin. Wooden posts were used for fencing arable fields, and for the construction of a kraal by the one member keeping cattle on the land. Dead wood is plentiful on the farm and, as much of the land has been overgrown through decades of neglect, there appeared to be no restrictions on the cutting of trees. None of the respondents or other informants reported any sales of firewood or other natural resources, although people from the neighbouring township and villages appear to extract considerable quantities for their own use, something that the Shimange members are not in a position to prevent. None

of the respondents reported hunting for wildlife on the farm, but again it was reported that people from neighbouring communities regularly trapped wild animals on the land.

Support services

The RLCC for Limpopo facilitated the acquisition of Syferfontein under the restitution programme. The settlement agreement signed by the parties stipulates that the RLCC would co-ordinate the involvement of other parties to the settlement. These included the Makhado Local Municipality, the Department of Local Government and Housing, and the DoA:

The Department of Land Affairs undertakes to release planning grants and restitution discretionary grants due to this claim. The Regional Land Claims Commission undertakes to assist the claimant community to negotiate with the Makhado Local Municipality, Limpopo province Department of Agriculture and the Department of Local Government and Housing in accessing all the necessary development grants available for the development of their land. (Settlement Agreement 2002)

The RLCC has not fulfilled this obligation to date. For example, when the beneficiaries visited the local municipality requesting a water connection, they were told that the municipality does not deal with land reform beneficiaries and that they should go instead to the Department of Water Affairs.

In terms of the settlement agreement, the transfer of formal title remains dependent on implementation of all aspects of the agreement and finalisation of a business plan:

The state shall take all the necessary steps to transfer the said land to the communal property association...The department reserves the right to delay transfer until the Shimange communal property association has ratified the terms and conditions of this agreement and has an approved business plan. (Settlement Agreement 2002)

To date, the RLCC has not transferred the title deeds to the Shimange CPA, and has not been able to facilitate completion of a business plan, other than the LUDP, which is basically a 'wish list' of all the things that the community could potentially do with the farm if sufficient resources and co-ordination were available.

Since the preparation of the LUDP, communication between the CPA and the RLCC has broken

down because of the unavailability of the 'main committee', the lack of progress in the release of grants and the unwillingness of the committee to delegate powers to other, locally based members. The RLCC has argued that the problem is within the main CPA committee, which wants the money to be deposited directly into the account of the CPA, contrary to the practice of the RLCC of paying grants directly to service providers following quotations.

The Limpopo DoA purchased a machinery 'starter pack' consisting of a tractor, disc plough, trailer, planter and rake for the Shimange CPA. The department has also made available a bulldozer for the community to use in establishing access roads and fire belts, and for de-bushing where necessary. The department provided a driver for the bulldozer for a number of months, but the farmers themselves had to pay for diesel.

In addition to providing the equipment, the DoA appointed an extension officer to support producers at Shimange and nearby restitution projects. This officer is responsible for the provision of extension support in livestock and crop farming, but rarely visits the farm. In October 2006, the farmers recorded that it had been six months since the last extension visit. Farmers active on the land, particularly in crop production, are not happy about the extension support that the DoA claims to provide. Producers also require help in accessing grants from the department, particularly Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) grants. With CASP funds they believe that they could establish fencing for the field and grazing camps, and could drill a borehole for water for irrigation, livestock and domestic use. Since 2004, the farmers have been asking officials of the Department for Information about CASP, but have made no progress in this regard to date.

Through its education and training arm, the Madzivhandila Agricultural College, the DoA has trained two of the farmers at Shimange in vegetable production, broiler production and soil analysis. The trainees reported, however, that a lack of financial resources was preventing them from putting their knowledge into practice.

Further support for farmers at Shimange has been provided by the Nkuzi Development Association. Nkuzi was involved in the facilitation of the land claim up to the point of settlement and with the formation of the CPA; upon the settlement of the claim, it assisted in poultry production and planning for a macadamia or-

chard and a vegetable garden. Nkuzi helped secure grant funding for training in game farming, crop farming, tree management and broiler production. The association helped with the purchase of implements such as spades and wheelbarrows, as well as with bricks and cement for building enclosures for poultry and pigs. Nkuzi also provided the occupiers with 100 macadamia trees, which later died because of lack of water. This NGO has continued to play an advisory role to the farmers and has tried repeatedly to draw the project to the attention of the Makhado municipality, in the hope of having this and other restitution settlements included in the municipal integrated development plans (IDPs) and local economic development (LED) plans, without success so far.

The Makhado Local Municipality has a potentially important role to play in terms of providing services at Shimange, but to date has taken no measures to support this or other land reform projects within its area of jurisdiction. On numerous occasions, Shimange community representatives have requested the municipality to provide water and electricity to the farm. These efforts have proved unsuccessful, because the local municipality claims that it is not their mandate to deal with land claims, and reportedly has told the members that the municipality cannot install infrastructure since the area is not proclaimed as a township (focus-group discussion, Shimange, 16.10.06).

Benefits and livelihood impacts

Eight of the respondents said that they had no access to arable land prior to coming to the farm; the other three reported having plots ranging from one to four hectares at their home villages. One member reported grazing livestock (cattle) on the farm, and another reported grazing cattle on the communal land at her home village.

Overall, seven of the 11 respondents reported that they were better off since joining the project, with the other four reporting no change. The main problems confronting farmers at Shimange are the lack of infrastructure and support services, and the ongoing conflicts within the CPA, which are seen as delaying development on the farm. Eight respondents mentioned lack of infrastructure or equipment as one of their main concerns, three mentioned the absence of extension or support services, two mentioned problems with wild animals and one each men-

tioned poor group dynamics and difficulties in marketing crops. Interestingly, none mentioned insecure land rights, despite the somewhat informal allocation of plots that has occurred to date. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the fact that the land has been formally transferred to the community (although they are not yet in possession of the title deed), and the current occupiers clearly do not feel that the wider Shimange community (i.e. the CPA) poses any threat to their activities.

Analysis and recommendations

Shimange is typical of numerous restitution projects around the country where land has been restored to a community and yet, years later, few if any benefits have accrued to members (see CASE 2005 and PLAAS 2006). It is also typical in that, in the shadow of an elaborate, but probably impractical, 'whole-farm' and 'whole-community' plan, a minority of community members are pressing ahead with production at a relatively small scale.

According to our findings, only 11 households, out of a possible total of 250, were actually using the Shimange land. Various other individuals had stayed on the farm for up to a year prior to the commencement of our research, but had abandoned it in the face of chaotic community politics, a lack of agreement as to the future use of the land and a lack of effective support from state agencies. Of the three largest crop producers, one had full-time employment off the farm (as a teacher) and two were in receipt of employer pensions. Only one of these three had reached the stage of regular sales of produce, and all were constrained by the poor infrastructure on the farm (particularly irrigation), a lack of external support and the need to fund all investments from their own (or household) income. The others who produced crops did so on a scale barely sufficient to meet household needs for maize and vegetables. Where a surplus was sold, the income was almost certainly insufficient to buy the food required during the leaner months of the year. Use of purchased inputs such as fertiliser and pesticide was minimal, and the prospects for expanding production appeared remote for the majority of producers. Interest in livestock among the respondents was also minimal, which could be attributed to a range of factors, including the non-farming background of some, the poor state of infrastructure on the

farm, especially fencing and water supply, and the fact that most respondents did not stay permanently on the farm. The one notable exception to this pattern was the poultry enterprise of Siphon and Constance, which was made possible by the intervention of a local NGO and originally was intended for the entire (undifferentiated) 'community'. This enterprise remained at a rudimentary level, without a supply of electricity or piped water, but was generating a modest income for its owners.

The many problems confronting Shimange have their origins in the interplay of community politics and official planning processes. Prior to the settlement of their claim, it would appear that the Shimange community had no clear plan as to what they would do with their land once it was restored to them. Respondents in our study, who may not be at all representative of the wider community of 250 households, suggested that their interest was in residential stands and plots for individual crop production, possibly with some communal areas for grazing livestock. The South African approach to restitution, however, with regard to community claims, is to restore land to entire communities, represented by formal legal entities. This sets in motion a process whereby the claimant community, no matter how scattered or differentiated, is required to act as a single entity, which pushes it towards collective forms of production. This unitary tendency is reinforced by state officials, backed up by private-sector consultants, who emphasise 'whole-farm' solutions based on dubious models of 'commercial' farming. In the case of Shimange, this has resulted in an elite leadership that appears to have no interest either in occupying the farm or in managing it themselves, and is satisfied to play the role of non-executive directors presiding over a commercial enterprise that will deliver them a stream of income for little or no effort. This model is rejected by at least part of the membership, for whom direct access to land for food production is a greater priority. The possibility of allocating plots to individuals or households for their own use appears to have received no support from the official leadership and would face certain opposition from officials and their consultants.

The combination of a remote leadership, an incomplete business plan and a largely unresponsive RLCC has meant that the settlement agreement, signed in 2002, has yet to be implemented. The existence of a 'local committee' in competition with the official CPA committee suggests

a split in the community, although our lack of contact with the great majority of members means that we cannot say how significant this split may be. The people currently occupying the farm, however, would not appear to be in a position to block any initiatives taken by the wider community or the official leadership of the CPA. Rather than being the source of the problem (as they are sometimes described by officials of the RLCC), the current occupiers would seem to be merely availing themselves of an opportunity to improve their livelihoods on their ancestral land, to which, following the settlement of the claim, they feel a strong sense of entitlement.

The fact that the settlement agreement remains unimplemented after five years reveals much about the Shimange community and about the quality of post-settlement support provided by the official agencies responsible. Once the initial 'business plan' (the LUDP) had been produced, the RLCC would appear to have lost interest in the project. The role envisaged for the RLCC was two-fold – to release the outstanding grants due to the community and to garner support from a range of local and provincial government agencies, neither of which it has done. It is not clear why the official CPA leadership has not made more of an effort to push ahead with the implementation of the 'business plan' and to pressure the RLCC to release the outstanding grants, but several possibilities present themselves – the incomplete nature of the 'business plan', the lack of any obvious source for the substantial additional capital required for its implementation, and a lack of support among the wider Shimange membership for such a centralised, commercial farming model. In the absence of a strong, unified message from the community, the RLCC appears content to let the project drift indefinitely, and has done little or nothing to assist the CPA to produce a more acceptable plan or to appoint a more popular or effective leadership. In the absence of any clear sense of direction or purpose from the CPA itself, it is perhaps not surprising that the RLCC has made no effort to mobilise the support from provincial and local government agencies envisaged in the settlement agreement.

The Shimange CPA appears to be highly ineffective and is clearly not fulfilling its formal functions. As far as could be established, it has not held an AGM or other formal meeting since its foundation, other than 'community meetings' held at the farm on some holiday occasions,

which do not appear to include any elections or formal decision-making. Although the official constitution of the CPA is a standard document, supplied by the RLCC, with explicit provisions for annual meetings, regular elections and the like, it appears to be widely ignored by the leadership, and the membership do not appear to be in a position to challenge this. Most importantly, perhaps, the DLA seems to be making no effort to monitor or regulate the activity of the Shimange CPA, as envisaged under the CPA Act. As a result, the CPA leadership can act (or in this case, fail to act) with impunity, and the membership is effectively deprived of any recourse when its rights are ignored.

The experience of the occupiers of Uitschot farm, however, provides a valuable contrast to the experience on Syferfontein. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Uitschot fell outside of the formal restitution claim, and this does not seem to be a major cause of concern for the CPA leadership or general membership (or at least those occupying Syferfontein). It has been left, therefore, to a small group of related households, descendants of the original inhabitants, to occupy this portion of land and to use it as best they can. The relatively large plots and greater scale of production evident on Uitschot can be attributed to the higher off-farm incomes of the farmers and the absence of contestation among them. The lack of support from state agencies can be seen as a negative feature, but in this they are effectively no worse off than farmers on Syferfontein or in the other cases presented in this report. Perhaps the greatest contrast between the two farms, however, is the clear sense of purpose and long-term vision of the farmers at Uitschot. Despite the lack of any formal tenure rights, occupiers are fencing and clearing large plots, building permanent houses and investing in irrigation infrastructure. One interpretation of this would be that the uncertainty and contestation arising from a large dysfunctional 'community', albeit one that now has, in theory, strong formal rights to its land, outweighs the uncertainty arising from having no formal rights at all.

Reforming the Shimange project in a way that fulfils the vision of restitution and secures sustainable benefits for community members presents multiple challenges. Unlike the other case studies, building on existing practice is unlikely to be sufficient, and a more radical overhaul will be required. Several starting points can be recommended.

The first of these is the necessity of addressing the internal organisation of the Shimange CPA. There is a clear need for the RLCC, as the agency directly responsible for the restitution settlement, to facilitate a process whereby democratic practices can be established and maintained within the CPA. This should begin with a general meeting of the membership, overseen by the RLCC, where the provisions of the CPA constitution (and of the CPA Act) can be explained to members and a new committee can be elected.

The reform of the CPA cannot be separated, however, from the second great need, which is for an entirely new planning process for the restored lands. As argued above, the original planning process was heavily influenced by the expectations emanating from the RLCC for a centralised, 'commercial' farm plan. A renewed planning process should begin without such predetermination, and explore a wider range of possibilities in the light of the preferences expressed by the membership. The outcomes of this process are likely to have implications for the future form of the CPA and the choice of leadership. If, for example, it were decided not to proceed with a commercial farming model, but rather to allocate land to individual members for a variety of uses, then the function of the CPA leadership would shift from running a business to land administration. This might have the effect of reducing the expectations placed on the leadership, discouraging self-interested individuals and opening up positions to a wider cross-section of the membership.

The original LUDP threw up a wide variety of possible land uses, but did not ground them in the needs of the members or any analysis of the local economy. It seems highly unlikely that the farm would be capable of generating significant material benefits for such a large group of members, even with high levels of investment and sound management. Rather, creative ways will have to be found of distributing both symbolic and material benefits among the membership. Opening up the land for residential purposes, say on one-hectare plots, would be one way in which benefits could be accessed by relatively large numbers, although it is likely that many of the urban-based members would not want to relocate. The existing allocation of arable plots, most of which are less than one hectare in extent, also suggests a possible way of dividing up

the land, but this is likely to be constrained by the limited areas of good quality arable land on the farm. Larger arable plots, or grazing rights, could be leased to members, and the income redistributed amongst the general membership, but, given the potential returns on agriculture in this area, it is likely that such benefits would be little more than token.

Quite a separate process will be required for the farm Uitschot, which is probably capable of making a substantial contribution to the livelihoods of the small number of households who are interested in, and who have demonstrated a commitment to, living and working on the land. If, as appears to be the case, Uitschot has fallen outside the ambit of the restitution process, then it should be treated as a case of state-owned land that is being occupied informally, and seemingly without contestation from any party, by a group who claim strong historical links to the it (but for whom a formal restitution claim is no longer a possibility). The Restitution of Land Rights Act makes explicit provision for people who may have a claim to restitution but fall outside the strict requirements of the Act, which would seem to be applicable in this case and might involve the RLCC referring the 'claimants' to the redistribution programme of the DLA.³⁹ Alternatively, they could apply for a SLAG or LRAD grant in order to purchase the state land they occupy, which has already happened in numerous cases in Limpopo and is in line with the government's policy of disposing of state-owned agricultural land. In any event, the occupiers should be entitled to legal protection of their current informal land tenure rights. Of particular importance in this regard is that, as far as could be established, no government agency has any plans for this land and the officials contacted seemed unaware of its existence. Closer integration of the land and farmers of Uitschot with the broader Shimange CPA, as some of the occupants of Uitschot suggested, would seem to have little to recommend it.

Overall, Shimange highlights the challenges implicit in restoring land to relatively large communities. Much more will be required, from state agencies and the community, if sustainable solutions are to be found that give meaningful effect to the process of restitution and address the pressing needs for employment and food security.

³⁹ Section 38E of the Act allows the Land Claims Court to 'make recommendations to the Minister regarding the most appropriate form of alternative relief, if any, for those claimants who do not qualify for the restitution of rights in land in terms of the Act'.

Chapter 7: Key findings and policy recommendations

This study has investigated the impact of land reform and land access on the lives of relatively poor rural people, and the contribution of small-scale agriculture to household livelihoods. It has also investigated the range of factors that influence the ability of people to use such land, and the prospects for improving agricultural productivity and the benefits accruing to producers and their households. This chapter elaborates on the key findings emerging from the study, including the differences and similarities found across the four case studies from Limpopo. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policy reform, with particular emphasis on project planning and design, support to communal property institutions and agricultural support services.

Land use and settlement

In all four case studies, land was being used at well below its full potential. There is, however, anecdotal evidence to suggest that it may be used more intensively now than in the years immediately prior to the arrival of the current occupiers, challenging the belief that land reform poses a threat to agricultural productivity. Shimange, and large parts of Mahlahluvani, effectively constituted unused state land for many years, while Monyamane and Dikgolo appear to have been neglected by their former white owners.

Land use in these cases can be reduced to three main types: individual (household) cropping on generally small plots; collective management of cattle herds; and small-scale natural resource extraction. In addition, collective cropping had been attempted, and abandoned, at Dikgolo and Monyamane, while collective vegetable production was being experimented with of late at Dikgolo. Collective poultry production was also planned for Dikgolo, but had yet to get off the ground, while a similar experiment at Shimange had rapidly been reduced to a private enterprise run by just two of the members. A limited amount of grazing of privately owned livestock was also taking place at Dikgolo and Shimange, but not at Monyamane or Mahlahluvani.

In three out of the four cases – Dikgolo, Mahlahluvani and Shimange – individual cropping

was the main activity and the main source of benefit to the participants. This cropping was largely rain-fed, but experiments with low-technology forms of irrigation were underway in all these cases, most significantly at Shimange. At Mahlahluvani and Shimange, irrigation of individual plots made use of available surface water (springs and streams); at Dikgolo, water for the new communal vegetable plot was being pumped from a borehole. The use of pumped water was proving particularly problematic to the participants at Dikgolo, in terms of the cost of operation and maintenance (including security) of equipment, and a similar experiment had been abandoned at Monyamane for the same reasons. Crops grown were all staple food crops, widely consumed within the local areas and, with two exceptions (one household at Mahlahluvani and one at Shimange), were grown specifically for consumption within the producer's own household. While occasional sales and gifts of surplus crops, particularly vegetables, did occur, these were sporadic and were seen by most of the producers as a bonus rather than as a specific objective of their farming activity.

The scale of individual cropping was constrained by a number of factors, primarily the availability of labour within producers' households and the limited cash available for the purchase of seed and other inputs. All but one plot at Mahlahluvani, and the majority of plots at Shimange, were cultivated by hand, as producers did not have access to (or could not afford to hire) a tractor. At Dikgolo, annual ploughing of individual plots was financed by income from the collective cattle herd, although all other work was done by hand. Somewhat ironically, the only group with regular access to a tractor was Monyamane, which had abandoned ploughing of their communal plot due to problems with water supply and wild animals. Land itself was generally not in short supply, with the partial exception of Mahlahluvani, where thick bush and forest hemmed in the arable plots, and therefore cannot be seen as a major constraint on production.⁴⁰ Rather, topography, variable soil qualities and the very limited availability of water combined to reduce the areas that could reasonably be brought into production under the current conditions.

⁴⁰ It should be borne in mind that in all four cases only a minority of the people with potential claims to the land in question were actually using it.

While some households clearly could not afford the labour and other input costs that would be associated with an expansion of production, it would appear that many had limited objectives in agriculture and were well aware of the risks involved in increasing their efforts. It seems reasonable to conclude that producers were willing, or felt compelled, to invest labour and small amounts of cash in order to secure a supply of staple food crops, but were generally averse to investing cash in increasing their production beyond this; the very limited use of chemical fertiliser is the most obvious example of the tendency. Thus, the opportunity cost of household labour, up to a certain point, can be seen as relatively cheap and worth investing in cropping in order to boost household food supply. Disposable cash, however, can be seen as relatively scarce, and having multiple demands on it, making it unacceptable for use in the relatively risky business of dry-land cropping. Moreover, as demonstrated in all the case studies, disposing of surplus crops on poorly developed and cash-constrained local markets, in competition with large-scale producers and shops, carries its own risks and may serve as an additional disincentive to producing beyond what any one household can consume.

Collective management of cattle herds featured prominently at Dikgolo and Monyamane (and was proposed in the Land Use and Development Plan for Shimange). For reasons that remain obscure, officials and planners promoted the purchase of new herds, and collective ownership, and tried to prevent any access to the land for members' own cattle. This rule continues to be observed at Monyamane, but is discreetly ignored at Dikgolo. In both cases, the herds have expanded purely through natural growth – no additional animals have been purchased in either case – and while there has been some off-take, it appears low by conventional standards. Although sales of cattle are informal and appear to be driven by demand, it was clear that bulls were being systematically disposed of while breeding cows were being retained. No difficulties were reported in disposing of cattle on local markets.

Maintenance of the grazing camps has proven to be a major challenge for both groups. The infrastructure on the Dikgolo and Monyamane farms appears to have been in a poor state of repair when they were acquired, and to have deteriorated further during the lengthy handover period when neither the old nor the new own-

ers were fully in control of the farms. Substantial investment is now required on both farms for repairs to fencing and the installation of water points. The solitary operational wind pump on Dikgolo seems to be the most reliable aspect of the infrastructure, suggesting that such low-tech solutions should be encouraged over more costly diesel pumps, which are clearly vulnerable to theft.

Both Dikgolo and Monyamane have experienced problems with animal health and with accessing state veterinary services. In this, they are probably no different to stock-owners on nearby communal lands, but there is clearly a need for a more responsive and accessible veterinary service than is being provided currently by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (DoA).

Both groups have chosen to employ full-time herders to care for their cattle, with Monyamane employing people who are not considered members of the project. While this appears to be a workable arrangement, it highlights some of the weaknesses in the collective ownership model for livestock. Firstly, cattle herding does not appear to be an attractive proposition to the majority of members, because of the long hours, isolation and risks to personal security, especially at night and at weekends. Secondly, the number of jobs created is minimal – just two low-paid positions in each case, paying approximately one-third of the legal minimum wage.

There would appear to be considerable scope for improving the value of livestock production and the benefits to members in all four cases under investigation. Both Dikgolo and Monyamane maintained herds well below the carrying capacities quoted in planning documents and by government officials, although the situation at Dikgolo was complicated by the presence of members' own stock. At Shimange, large areas of land suitable for grazing were lying unused. At Mahlahluvani, there appeared to be considerable scope for grazing on the margins of the arable plots, judging by the activities of neighbouring communities, although livestock farming was not a priority for the members of this group. Marketing of animals did not appear to be a constraint, as there was strong local demand in all areas for informal sales. While veterinary services and investment in fencing are important, the key to expanded livestock production would seem to lie in a reliable water supply and a permanent human presence on the farms. While the collective ownership and man-

agement of herds seems to be generating modest benefits at Dikgolo and Monyamane, there is no obvious reason why livestock belonging to individual members should be excluded, as long as numbers could be regulated. A complete switch from collective to individual livestock production does not appear to have been considered by either of the two groups, and is likely to be unpopular, given the lack of recent experience of livestock ownership by many members and the demands it would place on households in terms of herding.

Natural resource extraction of various sorts was found in all four cases, but this does not appear to make a major contribution to people's livelihoods. Firewood is the main benefit in most cases, with both Dikgolo and Monyamane (situated in areas of general scarcity of wood) supplying bakkie loads to members on important occasions. Thatching grass was collected by a minority of members, especially at Mahlahluvani where the incidence of traditional housing was highest. Other natural resources exploited by members included various wild herbs and fruits, plant materials for use in traditional medicine, wood for carving into household implements and for decorative purposes and, on a very small scale, wild animals that were hunted for their meat and skins. None of these resources was found to be exploited on a systematic basis for commercial gain, but there can be little doubt that they make a useful contribution to the livelihoods of those concerned.

The absence of residential developments is one of the most distinct characteristics of the South African approach to land reform. In three of the cases presented here – Dikgolo, Monyamane and Mahlahluvani – there were no plans for members to relocate their homes to the acquired land, even though in all these cases members highlighted problems arising from having nobody living full-time on the farms and the inconvenience and expense of travelling from their homes. In the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) projects of Dikgolo and Monyamane, the main reason offered for non-residence was hostility to the idea from officials of the Departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs and their appointed consultants. It is not clear how willing people would be to relocate if such opposition were withdrawn, but it appears likely that at least some members would stay on the land, perhaps temporarily or on a rota basis, if they felt this were allowed. Further barriers to

resettlement include the lack of infrastructure on the farms, particularly water, sanitation and electricity, and their distance from facilities such as shops, schools and clinics. Ample evidence was uncovered in this study of the failure of local government to provide any services to land reform projects, and hostility to the creation of new settlements could be expected from this quarter as well. Some contrast to this pattern is presented by the case of Shimange, where a number of people have taken up residence in the old farmhouses on Syferfontein and others have built new houses on the farm Uitschot, perhaps due to its ambiguous status, which puts it beyond the gaze of government agencies. Shimange is within a kilometre of the township of Vleifontein, and the ongoing refusal of the Makhado Local Municipality to extend services to the farm – precisely because it is a farm – gives cause for concern regarding the commitment of local government to land reform.

Livelihood impacts

The impact of land reform can be assessed according to various criteria: changes in welfare for a particular group of people, changes in productivity for a particular area of land, or return on public investment, amongst others. In all four cases studied, a large majority of respondents felt that their lives had improved since they acquired land, but generally not as much as they had expected when they joined. The livelihood impact can, therefore, be seen as broadly positive, if very limited, and substantially below the projections contained in official planning documents, however credible these may be. As argued above, anecdotal evidence suggests that the land in question has not suffered a drop in production as a result of land reform, but neither is it being used at, or close to, its full potential.

The benefits to members of these groups came in various forms: opportunities for self-employment (often for more than one household member), a supply of staple food crops (typically in excess of six months' worth per household for maize), opportunities for a minority of farmers to obtain a cash income through crop sales, albeit very limited in most cases, a share of meat or vegetables from collective production, access to natural resources for own use, of which firewood was the most important, and, in the case of Monyamane only, a share of cash income from livestock sales.

Quantifying the precise benefits to individual farmers, or the value of inputs provided by them, would require a more detailed methodology than was applied in this study and, ideally, the collection of data over a number of years. Calculations made as part of the case studies, however, suggest that the net contribution to households in the great majority of cases is well below what could be earned by a single worker receiving the statutory minimum wage, although not necessarily much less than the wage rates at the bottom of the informal labour market (e.g. the wages earned by casual workers on these farms).

While land is clearly the most valuable asset obtained by people in all these cases, participation in the official land reform process has also provided access to other resources. In Dikgolo and Monyamane, this included a herd of cattle that has increased in value and generated a small income over time. In Dikgolo, this income has been important as a means of subsidising tractor ploughing on members' own plots and of investment in farm infrastructure. At Monyamane, it went towards buying a tractor and remains the main source of project income for members. At Shimange, members were provided with a tractor and implements by the DoA, which they found impossible to maintain, but also benefited from land clearance carried out by a departmental bulldozer. At Dikgolo and Shimange, members obtained assistance from the Nkuzi Development Association, which led to the construction of poultry sheds and the establishment of a vegetable garden at Dikgolo and a poultry enterprise now run as a private business by two members at Shimange. Unfortunately, support from external agencies, whether state or NGO, has been largely haphazard, and entirely absent for long periods.

Communal property institutions

All four cases presented here involve legally constituted communal property institutions (CPIs) that, in theory, should hold title to the land on behalf of their members and take responsibility for administration and development of the land. As in many other areas, Mahlahlalani, as an informal land occupation and incomplete restitution process, presents something of a special case, but also has aspects in common with the others.

Three of the four cases involve a communal property association (CPA), registered in terms

of the Communal Property Associations Act 28 of 1996, and one (Dikgolo) involves a trust, registered in terms of the Trust Property Control Act 57 of 1988. The choice of legal entity appears to be arbitrary: respondents at Dikgolo were of the opinion that the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) officials involved found it easier to register a trust than a CPA, even though a CPA, arguably, offers greater protection and functionality to its members. In none of the cases was there any evidence of the CPI functioning as a land-owning or land-administrating body, and serious questions can be raised as to whether these institutions are functioning at all. None of groups was in possession of a title deed to its land, or knew how to access it, and none held formal annual general meetings of the CPI or carried out the other routine activities associated with a CPA or trust. Some differences were found between the various cases, but the general pattern was one of paralysis at the formal institutional level.

Institutional arrangements in all these cases fell into two broad areas of activity. Prior to acquiring land, all four cases had a committee of some sort that led the land claim or grant application process on behalf of the group. Once land was acquired, however, day-to-day decision-making became the responsibility of farmers' committees, which were active in all cases but lacked formal legal status.

At Dikgolo, members had little awareness of the composition or function of the Dikgolo Trust, and no records could be found of formal trust meetings or other activities. As far as could be established, the title deed to the land had not been transferred to the trust, and, as explained above, some confusion remains around which portion of land the trust actually owns. In the meantime, the business of the group, including financial matters, allocation of plots and distribution of benefits, is managed by the less formally constituted farmers' committee, which, unlike the trust, does hold regular meetings and annual elections, and keeps written records of its activities. This committee has played a central role in negotiations with the Nkuzi Development Association around provision of resources for poultry houses and a vegetable garden. The question of lapsed members, however, continues to be a concern for the active members.

At Monyamane, the CPA effectively collapsed with the early departure of most of its members and committee members, and management of the farm is in the hands of the Monyamane

Farmers' Association. This group, like that at Dikgolo, holds regular meetings and annual elections, manages its own finances and keeps written records of its affairs. It also serves as the interface between members and the DoA around issues such as the construction of the reservoir. It is not, however, in possession of a title deed to the land, nor do its members have any awareness of the formal aspects of land ownership. Indeed, it is doubtful that the title deed was ever formally transferred to the Monyamane CPA. Even more so than at Dikgolo, given the mass departure of original members and the influx of new 'unofficial' members, farmers at Monyamane are concerned about their tenure status, especially in the light of official moves to restructure SLAG projects.

At Mahlahlalani, a formal CPA continues to operate but, as the restitution claim has not been resolved yet and no formal transfer of land has taken place, this functions mainly as a land claim committee. Whether it will be able to make the transition to a CPI following the settlement of the land claim remains to be seen. In the meantime, activities on the land are co-ordinated loosely by the farmers themselves, under the informal leadership of a group of older men. Frequent meetings of the farmers are held as the need arises, and written minutes are kept. To date, the Mahlahlalani farmers have had no financial dealings as a group, but have been discussing the establishment of a savings scheme, variously described as a funeral society, a *stokvel* and a fund for resisting official efforts to remove them from the land.

At Shimange, the land claim committee that oversaw the lodging of the original restitution claim was transformed into a CPA just prior to the settlement of the claim, seemingly without elections taking place. This 'official' committee, and the formal institution of the CPA, have been highly ineffective in the post-transfer period, failing to secure the grants owned to the members by the Regional Land Claims Commissioner (RLCC), or the services promised by various state agencies in terms of the settlement agreement, and generally failing to promote development on the land. As in the other cases discussed here, day-to-day management of the land has fallen to an informal committee, which co-ordinates the activities of the active members and attempts to liaise with external agencies, both state and NGO. The RLCC, however, does not recognise this 'local' committee, with the result that virtu-

ally no official assistance is being provided to the farmers, either by the RLCC itself or by the other state agencies with which, in terms of the settlement agreement, it is supposed to co-ordinate development activities.

In these cases, the CPIs are suffering not just from internal weaknesses, but also from a lack of external regulation as envisaged by the CPA Act. The CPAs at Monyamane and Shimange are clearly in need of intervention to restructure their affairs and membership, to ensure democratic and participatory processes and to strengthen their capacity to manage their own affairs. Dikgolo, as a trust, falls into a different legal category, but the type of intervention required is the same. At Mahlahlalani, major challenges lie ahead in reconciling the interests of the current land users and the wider membership of the claimant community. This will require a much more participatory and flexible planning process than has been in evidence in the other cases, and external support for the building of robust and effective institutions to hold the land and promote development. Under current circumstances, neither the DLA nor the RLCC in Limpopo is providing the support or regulation required by CPIs. Urgent interventions are required to address the functioning of these institutions, to resolve problems around membership and to ensure the transfer of title deeds to the relevant institutions.

The only official intervention in the area of CPIs that has been proposed to date is the so-called deregistration process organised by the Limpopo DoA and begun in March 2006, which has implications for Dikgolo and Monyamane. While some intervention is clearly required in order to resolve the question of active and inactive members of CPIs, this particular intervention can be critiqued on a number of grounds.

First, the process has been designed and implemented in a top-down manner, without consultation with those directly affected, giving rise to a sense of insecurity among CPA members. At Monyamane, for example, it has raised fears among the currently active members that they may be judged to be insufficiently productive (especially if evaluated against the implausible business plan drawn up by the same department in 1997), and may be 'deregistered' against their will. They also fear that by contacting lapsed members, as appears to be the intention, the department may reignite interest in the project among them, leading to the return of members

who have in the past proved unreliable – the opposite of what is intended by the deregistration process.⁴¹ No assurances have been offered to active farmers that they will not be targeted for deregistration.

Second, the political rhetoric surrounding the process speaks of failure, corruption and even lazy farmers.⁴² This creates the impression that farmers themselves are responsible for the many difficulties they face, and fails to address the problems of inappropriate planning and inadequate support over the years, many of them emanating from the same department now conducting the deregistration.

Third, the process of deregistration has been accompanied by statements regarding the restructuring of productive activities, including concepts such as ‘massification’ and the introduction of ‘strategic partners’ from the private sector. Members of the projects in this study had no idea of what the implications of such interventions might be for them, but it seems to indicate direct intervention by the DoA in farming operations. Given the poor track record of the department in the management of its own agricultural projects, and in the design and implementation of land reform projects to date, such proposals should give cause for concern.

While the restructuring and strengthening of CPIs is clearly an urgent need in Limpopo, this is legally the responsibility of the national DLA and should not be conflated with measures to support agricultural production. The DoA has an important role to play in supporting land reform beneficiaries, which will require thorough overhaul of the current highly ineffective system of extension and grant assistance provided by it. The current process of deregistration, however, appears to repeat many of the top-down interventions of the past, rather than working collaboratively with farmers to identify their needs and provide necessary support. SLAG projects and land restored under the restitution process remain private property, owned collectively by the members, and the state has no legal basis on which to interfere with property relations other than with the agreement of the members or to protect their interests.

Project design and support

Arguably, project design and support have been the greatest problems facing members of all four cases studied. Such problems are rooted in the

policies of a variety of state agencies, but also in the widespread failure to implement such policies adequately.

In the SLAG projects of Dikgolo and Monyamane, problems began with the excessive number of members and the purchase of relatively poor quality and poorly developed land. These factors can be related, in turn, to the small size of SLAG grants relative to the price of the land, a lack of official support for subdivision of properties and a lack of support to beneficiaries in identifying suitable land. These initial problems were compounded by top-down farm-planning processes based on abstract models of ‘commercial’ farming, drawn up with minimal consultation with the intended beneficiaries. The agricultural collectives thus imposed were fundamentally flawed in their lack of detailed planning, unrealistic assumptions about access to capital and lack of guidance as to how such large groups were expected to manage their affairs. Anticipated support to these projects from the DLA and DoA largely failed to materialise, and organs of local government, supposedly responsible for delivery of basic services to all, continue to deny responsibility for land reform projects within their jurisdiction.

Similar planning problems were evident in the restitution case of Shimange, although the choice of land here was driven by historical claims. An initial planning process, based again on minimal consultation with members, resulted in broad suggestions for land use based on conventional models of commercial farming under a single owner-occupier. As with the SLAG projects of Dikgolo and Monyamane, no attention was paid to the challenges posed by the involvement of a large and relatively poor group of members, or to the means by which resources and benefits could be shared amongst such a group, and no detailed plans were provided for accessing finance or embarking on productive activities.

At Mahlahluvani, farmers implemented their own system of land allocation and production, without the involvement of professional planners from the state or the private sector. This organic model reveals much about the aspirations and abilities of relatively poor, landless (or near landless) households. The central characteristics of this model are individual (or household) production and a focus on basic food crops for own consumption, within a context of mutual support and co-operation. Use of purchased inputs is kept to a minimum, due to shortages of cash

⁴¹One quite plausible reason given for this fear is that the department is promising to invest resources in ‘revived’ SLAG projects, which may attract some lapsed members.

⁴²See, for example, the news article ‘Lazy beneficiaries to lose land’, available at http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_1882654,00.html

and the many other demands on available cash resources. Expansion of production beyond this basic level is not a priority for the vast majority of households at Mahlahluvani, due to labour and cash constraints and the physical difficulties and financial risks associated with the marketing of crops. Farmers expressed interest in receiving services from state agencies or NGOs, as long as they were appropriate to their current activities and circumstances and did not attempt to impose alternative (e.g. 'commercial') models on them. In terms of land tenure, farmers were interested in securing rights to their individual plots but also recognised the importance of collective authority in the areas of resource management and the regulation of relations between members and with external authorities. While members were well aware of the need for tenure security, no interest was expressed in formal (i.e. freehold) title, either at the level of individual plots or for the property as a whole. Collective action is organised through an informal system, led by male 'elders', which is highly participatory and based on seeking consensus on all issues. Thus, in terms of land use, land tenure and collective action, the new settlement at Mahlahluvani mirrors the system that prevails in the members' home villages.

While Mahlahluvani can be seen as an exception in some respects, many aspects of this 'model' can be found in the other, more formally established cases. At both Dikgolo and Shimange, small-scale, household-based production of food crops, with minimal integration with input or output markets, has emerged as the main form of production, despite the prescriptions of their respective business plans. Livestock is the main collective activity found in these case studies, and is operated similarly on the basis of relatively low usage of purchased inputs. While cattle sales constitute the most 'commercial' aspect of these cases, it is significant that much of the cash income is spent on the maintenance of the herds or on productive activities more generally, and only at Monyamane does any cash income flow directly to members (albeit on a very modest scale). In all three formal land reform projects, day-to-day decision-making is in the hands of self-created structures, rather than the formal institutions created by the state. Allocation of plots to individual members is made informally, without official surveying or registration, which appears to meet the needs of members. Formal ownership of the property remains largely irrelevant, as the groups are not in possession of title

deeds, have little understanding of the implications of freehold title and have no plans to sell or mortgage their land. The formal institutions in whose name the land is registered have effectively collapsed in the cases of Dikgolo and Monyamane, and are ineffective in the case of Shimange.

The agricultural support available to farmers in all four cases has been extremely limited and largely inappropriate, and local officials of the DoA have displayed considerable hostility towards farmers on land reform projects in their areas. These problems extend far beyond these cases, and beyond land reform, pointing to fundamental problems in the services on offer by the Limpopo DoA and the manner in which these services are organised and delivered. Examples of such hostility encountered in the course of this research include the failure of extension officers to visit projects for lengthy periods and their failure to keep appointments once contact has been established, the outright refusal of officials to assist members of SLAG projects to apply for Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) funding, and threats to farmers that their activities were to be 'restructured' through the unilateral imposition of 'massification' and 'strategic partners'. Such problems are compounded by the failure of senior officials and politicians to respond to complaints made by farmers or to acknowledge that extension and veterinary services are not reaching many land reform beneficiaries.

While responsibility for post-transfer support to new farmers clearly lies with the DoA, the role of other institutions has also been problematic. The DLA, responsible for the implementation of SLAG and LRAD projects, and for the regulation of CPAs in both redistribution and restitution processes, has clearly not been following up with either the beneficiaries or the various support agencies once land transfer has taken place. The office of the RLCC, responsible for the restitution settlements, also appears to have done little to implement the terms of the settlement agreement at Shimange or to ensure that the Shimange CPA carries out its functions in terms of the law. While these institutions cannot be expected to take responsibility for all aspects of support to land reform projects over an indefinite period, the failure to communicate with other state agencies, or to plan the hand-over of responsibilities in an orderly manner, was widely cited by the DoA and local and district municipalities as a reason for their own lack of activity.

Implications for land reform and agricultural policy

Land reform policy has evolved gradually since 1994, and some of the issues raised by this research have been addressed already to various degrees through changes in policy. Nonetheless, many areas are still in need of reform and some of the reforms already undertaken appear not to have resolved the underlying problems. While some issues are unique to either restitution or redistribution, other cut across all areas of land reform. The main policy issues arising from this study are set out below.

Land selection

Would-be beneficiaries of land reform require assistance in selecting land of suitable size and quality, as close as possible to their homes. Whether the land is to be acquired on the open market, through expropriation or by the release of state land, farmers need to be assisted in selecting land that suits their needs. In many cases, this will require subdivision of existing farms in order to accommodate individual households or small, cohesive groups. Thus, the DLA, working closely with the DoA and the intended beneficiaries, should ensure that only the most appropriate land – in terms of size, quality and location – is provided under land reform. In addition, the DLA should ensure that basic infrastructure, such as fencing and water points, is in place before the handover of land to new owners.

Group formation

The problem of large groups has been addressed to some extent with the larger grants available under LRAD since 2001, but many older groups continue to face difficulties, many sizable groups are still being formed, especially among poorer beneficiaries, and group projects, or collectives, are still being imposed on communities claiming land under the restitution programme. In both redistribution and restitution there is a need to distinguish between how property is owned by a group and how it is actually used. Even where land is owned by a group, productive activities, as far as possible, should be in the hands of individual households or small groups. In many cases, this will require the formal subdivision of group-owned property. An important role can be played by the DLA in the supply of such land to small groups and individuals. Subdivision of properties into appropriately sized parcels – fitting the land to the people, rather than the

people to the land – should become a guiding principle of land reform policy, especially under redistribution.

Land use planning

Land use planning continues to be dominated by conservative notions of 'commercial' agriculture, which fail to take into account the resources and aspirations of poorer land reform beneficiaries. Frequently, unrealistic assumptions are made about the ability of new farmers to engage in production for the market and the ability of non-resident groups to manage whole farms along the lines of previous owner-occupiers. Planning should allow for a variety of land uses, but with a bias towards household-based production. Collective enterprises should be encouraged only where this is clearly supported by the intended beneficiaries. Plans should avoid reliance on borrowed capital, and build instead on the resources that beneficiaries can realistically afford and sustain. Production of food crops for consumption should be actively encouraged, and more elaborate, commercially oriented forms of production approached with caution. The current hostility towards residential settlements should be revised by the DLA, which should work with other spheres of government to promote the provision of housing and services on redistributed land. Finally, the DLA, as the agency responsible for land reform, should play a more active role in co-ordinating the activities of all responsible bodies, including private sector consultants, NGOs, the DoA and local government, during both the planning and the post-transfer phases, to ensure that land reform projects meet the needs of beneficiaries.

Communal property institutions

CPIs created under land reform are clearly in need of overhaul and support if they are to carry out their functions effectively. Legally, the regulation of CPAs is the responsibility of the DLA, and the department should play a much more active role in this area. Furthermore, the department should insist on the formation of a CPA, rather than a trust, for all group projects. CPAs require a variety of support and supervision, over an extended period. Members should be familiarised with the provisions of their CPA constitution and with their rights and responsibilities as members. Elected leaders need to be trained to carry out their functions in the areas of land administration and land development. Monitoring

is required to ensure that CPAs carry out their routine activities, such as keeping minutes and financial accounts, holding of AGMs, and compliance with principles of transparency, accountability and participatory democracy. Where CPAs are found not to be complying with the requirements of the CPA Act and their own constitutions, the department must be in a position to intervene in an appropriate manner, whether to assist with capacity building or to initiate legal action. NGOs may be well positioned to provide facilitation and training services, but this needs to happen within a clear regulatory framework overseen by the DLA.

Post-transfer support

All the institutions responsible for post-transfer support in Limpopo should urgently re-evaluate the services they are offering and how effective these are in reaching the intended beneficiaries. The DLA and the RLCC have a critical role in overseeing all aspects of project planning and implementation, and ensuring that other agencies are fully committed at all stages of the process. The Limpopo DoA should ensure that appropriate extension and veterinary services are available to all land reform beneficiaries on a routine basis, that local officials are carrying out the functions they are supposed to, and that grants such as CASP are actively promoted. Local government structures should be obliged to include land reform projects in their IDPs and LED programmes, if necessary through interventions at provincial and national Cabinet level.

The role of NGOs and researchers

NGOs and researchers have a critical role to play in land reform and can contribute much more than they have done to date in cases such as those discussed here. NGOs, in particular, can make valuable contributions in areas such as community facilitation, assisting poor and landless people to better understand the options available to them under land reform, and to help them to design projects that meet their needs. Following land transfer, NGOs should continue to play a role both in supporting productive activities and in building capacity within institutions such as farmers' committees and CPAs. There is a critical need for more research into the impact of land reform, both at the project level and at the wider programme level, particularly for longitudinal studies that track the experiences of beneficiaries over an extended period. NGOs and researchers need to find ways of con-

structively interacting with relevant state agencies, in order to share information and address matters of common concern. State agencies, in turn, should draw more on the capacity of NGOs and researchers to address areas where they are struggling to meet their responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study set out to make a contribution to the debate on land reform in South Africa, and particularly the impact of gaining access to land on the livelihoods of the rural poor. By including a range of case studies, it sought to broaden the conventional definition of land reform to include not only state-sponsored 'projects' but also the experience of farmers who are implementing their own solutions to landlessness and poverty by using the resources available to them. Taken together, Dikgolo, Monyamane, Mahlahlalani and Shimange have much to tell us about the limitations of state land reform policy, but also about the determination of many previously disadvantaged people to acquire land of their own and improve their livelihoods.

Land reform alone cannot be the solution to deeply entrenched problems of poverty and unemployment in areas such as Limpopo. The findings presented here suggest that the returns on agriculture for new entrants are likely to be very low, especially given the resource constraints facing most rural people and the limited support available from state agencies. Yet, agriculture is one of the few options open to many rural people, especially those unlikely to find employment in other sectors due to age, lack of appropriate skills or family responsibilities. Critical choices will have to be made as to whether land reform policy should promote access to land primarily for household food production – for which there is clearly a demand – or for more commercially oriented forms of production.

The switch from SLAG to LRAD, and the growing emphasis on strategic partnerships in redistribution, clearly favour a more commercial orientation, but this is likely to be expensive for the state and to benefit relatively few people. Providing relatively small areas of land to people for food production on a significant scale would require radical changes in the orientation of the DLA and the provincial DoA, and would require much greater involvement by local government in the provision of infrastructure. Such a programme need not be expensive, however, when compared to the current model. As the case

studies here demonstrate, small-scale food production can be sustainable over many years, can be largely self-organising, can absorb significant amounts of labour and can deliver a stream of benefits directly to poor households with minimal support from the state. Increasing access to

good quality land, with rudimentary infrastructure and a basic extension service, undoubtedly has the potential to provide an important supplement to household food security and the livelihoods of large number of rural people.

Appendix I: Organisations contacted during the research

Capricorn District Municipality	Makhado LED
Centre for Rural Community Development, University of Limpopo	Makhado Local Municipality
Chokoe LRAD project	Mamabola Tribal Council
Davhana Tribal Council	Manavhela Community
Department of Land Affairs, Limpopo Provincial Land Reform Office	Mavungeni CPA
Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Makhado	Monyamane Farmers Association
Dikgale Tribal Council	Munzhedzi CPA
Dikgolo Trust	Njhakanjhaka Tribal Council
Gulukfontein LRAD project	Noragrik
Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria	Polokwane Local Municipality
Landless Peoples Movement	Regional Land Claims Commissioner, Limpopo
Limpopo Department of Agriculture	Shimange CPA
Limpopo LED	Tau Phuti Tlou LRAD project
Madzivhadila Agricultural College	Univen
Mahlaluvani Community	University of Johannesburg
Majuta LRAD project	Vele LRAD project
	Vhembe District Municipality

Appendix 2: ‘A day on the farm’, by Marc Wegerif

It was just before six on an April morning, the sun had not yet risen, as we set out from the three rondavels that make up the homestead of Xikalamazula, his wife Johanna and their family in the village of Nwaxinyamani, Limpopo province.⁴³ Xikalamazula led the way, followed by Johanna and his eight-year-old grandson, Godsave. I stayed close to Xikalamazula, chatting to him as we walked briskly in the dawn light along a bumpy mud road between further homesteads, all crowded onto small plots of around 30 metres by 30 metres.

We were setting out for a day’s work in the fields that Xikalamazula has illegally cleared and planted on land he believes is rightfully his. His parents were removed from the land in the late 1950s while he was a small boy. Despite the land claims process being run in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994, Xikalamazula and other members of the Mahlahluvani community have not yet had their land returned; a group of close to 40 families has decided not to wait any longer and has occupied the state-owned land. They have been threatened with eviction, but continue farming – Xikalamazula says his family has to eat.

Xikalamazula and his wife have been farming the land for five years. He says that they started ploughing there because they were hungry and were going to their *Marumbini* (the place where they used to live). He completed only Standard Two (Grade Four) in primary school, and his wife has less education; neither of them speaks English. Xikalamazula has found it difficult to get work, something he attributes partly to the disability he has in one foot that causes him to limp, but which is not sufficiently serious for him to receive a state disability pension. Some time ago he lived in Alexandra, Johannesburg, and worked for a white person in the garden of their large house in Sandton. He has not had a regular job for a long time and is too young for an old-age pension. He has survived doing piecemeal work and by cutting and selling firewood. One day, he was at a meeting at the chief’s house and heard that people could get back their land. When he saw others were ploughing at their *Marumbini*, he decided to join them.

Xikalamazula has three children, one still at school and the others out of school, but unemployed. Two of the children live with their parents at home and the other is in Makhado (the nearest town about 40 km away). He also has two grandchildren that are living at home. One receives a child support grant of R190 per month, which is the only source of income aside from what the family can sell of what they produce and gather on the land. Almost all they produce is used for home consumption; some of the firewood that they bring back is sold to get cash that is needed for things like school fees and buying seeds.

The path we were following left the houses behind, going first through open land used for cattle grazing and then working its way between fields planted with maize and other crops. Xikalamazula looked with disdain at the withered maize stalks visible in most of the fields we passed, ‘this soil has nothing, you are wasting your time to try and grow crops here’, he said. The path became narrower and started to rise until we were climbing a steep slope surrounded by thick bush. As we got higher we found ourselves surrounded and soaked by a morning mist.

Eventually, we reached the blue gum trees that form part of a plantation and then, from the top of the ridge, joined a track used by the forestry vehicles and followed this down towards the valley where Xikalamazula and others are farming.

An hour and ten minutes after leaving Nwaxinyamani, we were walking along the forest track when we arrived at a rough gate in a fence made out of sticks and thorn bushes. Looking over the gate, one could suddenly see a whole valley that had been cleared and planted with maize and other crops, as well as a few small huts in the different fields that covered the slopes of the valley and the hills on the opposite side.

Before starting work, Xikalamazula called out to his neighbours to see who was around. A few voices answered from across the valley, although with the mist it was hard to see anyone. There was smoke rising from one of the huts some distance away, indicating someone was already

⁴³ Xikalamazula, a bracelet made of goat’s skin, is the nickname Morgan Sithole was given as a boy when he did traditional dancing.

cooking or just warming themselves. It was a Tuesday morning after the long Easter weekend and it seemed that the other farmers were slower than usual in arriving to work in their fields; the mist and rain may also have encouraged some to delay at home. As the day wore on, more farmers passed by and could be seen working in their fields. A neighbour came over and discussed plans with Xikalamazula for the funeral of one of the farmers they worked with who had passed away a few days before. Xikalamazula suggested that they should all meet in the next few days and that people should contribute R5 each to assist with the funeral expenses.

There was also a discussion with a few of the neighbours about cattle getting into the fields and eating the maize. A woman farmer said she had found cattle in the fields the day before and chased them out, but had not been able to find where they had got through the fence. The crudely constructed perimeter fence that they all assist in maintaining surrounds Xikalamazula's and the adjoining fields. Between each plot are smaller fences made of sticks that mark the boundaries, but, in most cases, these would not deter cattle or other animals.

The person who had passed away was a man in his late fifties who had been working for a few years on the land. I asked what would happen to his land, and Xikalamazula explained that the man's wife who had been working with him on the land would continue doing so, as they were now her fields.

The main task for the day was harvesting maize. We collected the maize cobs, putting them into cloth tied around our shoulders and then transferring them into sacks when the cloth was full. Xikalamazula wanted to collect the maize that was close to a beehive while it was still cold and misty, as he knew the bees would not be active in those conditions. He gave Godsave (his grandson) an old bucket and got him to start collecting some small tomatoes growing amongst the maize stalks. After a while, Johanna went to another part of the field to harvest peanuts. She came back with a small sack of peanuts and was chewing on some sugar cane.

Godsave soon sat next to the hut playing a game with some sticks and stones. There was no pressure on him to work; now and again he contributed and, when we walked back, he helped to carry a bag for a while, but Xikalamazula soon assisted him with it. Although this should have

been the boy's first day back at school after a few weeks holiday, apparently his uniform was not ready.

At some point while we were working, Sarah arrived and started harvesting maize in her field. Sarah is a widow living near to Xikalamazula in Nwaxinyamani. Her husband passed away about five years ago, and as she had no work Xikalamazula suggested she come and join them in farming.

After about an hour of work, the mist turned to light rain, which we endured for a while before taking refuge in the hut. The round thatched hut of about 3.5 metres in diameter was used for storing some of the products from the fields and things such as the old buckets and sacks used for collecting crops. More valuable tools like axes and hoes are carried home or hidden in the bush to avoid theft. Half the floor of the hut was covered in a mound of maize cobs harvested by Xikalamazula; a smaller pile of maize belonged to Sarah, who shared the field with Xikalamazula. There were quite a few pumpkins in a pile, some firewood and pots used for cooking lunch. On my previous visit to the farm, I had shared some *mcomboti* (home-brewed beer) that Xikalamazula had in a 5-litre container, but this time there was no sign of the beer.

When the rain stopped, we went back to the fields. Xikalamazula now worked on the land that had been ploughed by Sarah and I joined him there. Sarah's field is within the field fenced by Xikalamazula and there was no boundary visible to me between her fields and his. Despite the lack of any clear boundary, and the assistance we gave in her harvesting, she and Xikalamazula were very clear on what was her crop and what was his. At one point, as I reached to pull a maize cob from the stalk, Xikalamazula, who I thought was absorbed in his own work, stopped me and said, 'that is mine'. I left the stalk and moved further to the side ploughed by Sarah, taking care to check where Xikalamazula stopped harvesting. All the maize we picked in her field went into a separate sack and was stored separately, although in the same hut.

Johanna worked in a different part of the fields, collecting pumpkin leaves and flowers. The work proceeded at a steady pace and hours passed. We were not overexerting ourselves and chatted now and again with each other as we worked and with other farmers who passed by. The maize cobs varied in quality; many were a bit

eaten by worms and others were clearly not of the ideal size, but nevertheless a substantial crop was being harvested. It was hard to estimate the total amount of maize the family will get this season; at the time of my visit, they had hired a bakkie to take two loads to the village, in addition to the sacks they carried back. In the following month, they moved another two bakkie loads. Certainly, they would have considerably more than they could eat this year and would either store for next year or sell some. Of great importance is the fresh maize they pick and eat on a daily basis when it is ripe. When asked to estimate how much maize they ate in that way before the harvest, Xikalamazula explained that for about two months they had eaten at least two cobs each while working in the fields. They roast these on an open fire, and then take home a further 12 to 15 cobs for the family every day.

The first person to return to the land to farm was 'Pushy' Hlongwane. He used several hectares of land at the bottom of the valley near a stream. Others seem to have followed his example and have come back to work the land.

Thomas Ndlovu, Johanna's brother, stopped and took shelter with us during the rain when he was on the way to his fields. Later, we saw him coming back, and Xikalamazula asked him if it would be possible to use some of his land next to a small river for planting vegetables such as cabbage and spinach. Xikalamazula's plot is quite high up the hill and not close to any water. If he could plant next to the river on his brother-in-law's land, he says he would water the vegetables by hand and be able to grow throughout the dry winter. Xikalamazula made it clear, and assured Thomas, that the land belonged to Thomas, as it had been the Ndlovu family's before they were removed. Xikalamazula said they would clear the land for Thomas and plant and leave the land for Thomas after harvesting their crops. The discussion did not finish with any clear agreement; Thomas said he might agree, but was a little cautious.

The total land area fenced by Xikalamazula, including the land currently used by Sarah, could be around three hectares; it is hard to measure, due to the contours of the land and the uneven shape of the plot. Xikalamazula and his wife ploughed the whole area with hand hoes and also cleared the bush themselves. There remain a few areas of bush within the fenced fields that could still be cleared. A few shade trees have been left in place. There are graves of Xikalama-

zula's grandparents on the plot, adding weight to his historical claim to that area. In addition to the field crops, there are several pawpaw trees and lemon trees on the plot.

Early in the afternoon, I went with one of the neighbouring farmers, Daniel Khumalo, to look for Pushy Hlongwane. I was interested to find out more about this man who seems to have started the land occupation that has led to large amounts of previously unused land being ploughed. We walked through several different fields. At the bottom of the valley, alongside a small stream, was a line of sugar cane. One of the huts we passed had neat rows of maize cobs tied by their stalks and suspended upside down from the ceiling. On another plot, planting areas had been shaped in steps along the contour of the hillside, and the farmer was preparing to plant an early winter crop of vegetables.

Daniel gave the same reasons as Xikalamazula for settling on the land, saying it was his family's *Marumbini*, and that his family had been hungry. He added that he had seen people coming back with maize and other produce from the land and had asked where they were coming from. One day he joined them and started clearing his own piece of land.

When we got to Pushy's fields there was no one to be found, only a dog to frighten away intruders, the monkeys and bush pigs. The hut, built in a rectangular shape, and incorporating a *toolu* (a traditional structure used for maize storage that keeps the maize off the ground) full of maize, was locked with a padlock. There were numerous avocado and mango trees on the plot as well as pawpaw, lemons and sugar cane. A large number of pumpkins could be seen through cracks in the hut's door, and maize, peanuts, beans and sweet potatoes were visible in the fields.

We walked back a different route, going past Daniel's fields, where we found his wife and a friend sitting by a fire in their hut. Daniel took his hoe and dug up some sweet potatoes that he gave to me. He said he sells sweet potatoes in the village at R10 for a 4 kg bucket.

When I returned, I found Xikalamazula collecting some thin poles that he said he was going to use to build a *toolu* at his place in Nwaxinyamani. He had also chopped up some old blue gum poles and had bound them together to be carried back to the village for firewood.

As we worked, we ate a few of the raw peanuts that Johanna had collected, and I was given a piece of sugar cane. Xikalamazula decided, I think out of sympathy for me, to leave earlier than they usually do (he said they normally stayed until four or five p.m.). So at about two-thirty in the afternoon, after seven-and-a-half hours in the fields, we started gathering all that we would take with us on the journey home.

The walk back took an hour and ten minutes, about the same as the journey in the morning. Although this time most of the journey was downhill, we were carrying heavy loads, with everyone assisting. We carried fresh maize cobs from some late-planted maize, which the family would eat that day, tomatoes, pumpkin leaves and flowers, a large pumpkin, peanuts, sweet

potatoes and two different types of wood, one that would be used to cook the meal and one to build with. We also had a sack of dry maize cobs that are being moved bit by bit down the hill before taking it for grinding at the mill in the neighbouring village. I realised that we were carrying everything the family would need to eat that evening, aside from water and the maize-meal that they had left at home from the previous year's crop.

About ten hours after arriving, I said goodbye to the Sithole family and drove away carrying gifts of sweet potatoes and sugar cane. I had also gained a renewed belief in the need for and potential of land reform, if it is driven and shaped by those who want to produce.

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